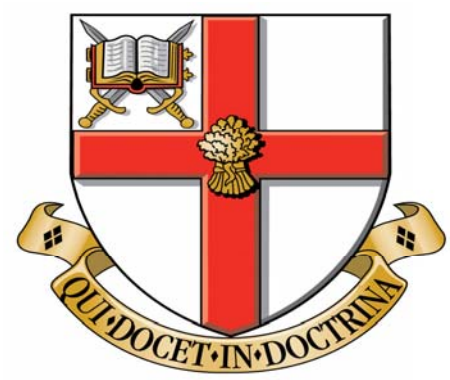


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Title: Compatible 'ways of being'?: A theoretical study of the compatibility of the person-centred approach and the Buddhist concept of mindfulness

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# Compatible 'Ways of Being'?

**A Theoretical Study of the Compatibility of the Person-Centred Approach and the Buddhist Concept of Mindfulness.**

**David Elias**

**Dissertation submitted to the University of Liverpool for the Degree of Masterof Arts (Counselling Studies) in part fulfillment of the Modular Programme in Counselling Studies.**

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# ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the compatibility of the philosophical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the person-centred approach and the Buddhist concept of mindfulness to clarify whether or not there is theoretical consistency for practitioners influenced by both approaches. The methodology used is a critique of the literature presented thematically, with arguments supported and extended by the authors own views and experience. It was concluded that, with the exception of relationship as a medium for change, there is a high degree of theoretical compatibility between the two approaches.

**The work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any qualification or course.**

**Signed:**

**David Elias**

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| | | |
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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to investigate the theoretical compatibility of two approaches concerned with experiental investigation of the self and relating to the world. One is the person-centred approach, a comparatively recent Western system of psychology, the other is the concept of mindfulness, which is an ancient meditation based component of Buddhism (referred to hereafter as 'mindfulness'). Both are currently offered in Britain as healthcare and personal development approaches. I am concerned to understand whether there is any conflict or contradictions between the philosophies and theoretical constructs that underpin them.

The purpose of this chapter is firstly to provide a brief overview of the person-centred approach and mindfulness and the contexts in which they sit. This is followed by a rationale for the study and statement of the research question. Finally the approach, focus and structure of the study are outlined.

### a) Overview

As is clear from the title this study is concerned with theory rather than practice. Theory here will primarily be aspects such as philosophies, beliefs, ethics and attitudes rather than structured models of personality and the like. In view of this it should be assumed throughout that I am selectively addressing matters of theory rather than practice.

The person-centred approach is an umbrella term for a system of psychological theory and practice which has applications in a variety of fields including, for example, education and business management. However, it is best known as a system of counselling and psychotherapy called either person-centred or client-centred counselling/therapy. In this study I am concerned with the approach as a system of self exploration and will therefore draw principally on the literature of counselling and therapy. Although some authors would,

in this context, make distinctions between client/person-centred therapy/counselling, these do not usually affect the main tenets of supporting theory, therefore I will use these terms interchangeably. I do however have a preference for person-centred over client-centred here as I am not only concerned with clients. For further discussion and clarification of what shelters under the umbrella of the person-centred approach to counselling and psychotherapy see Sanders (2000).

The American psychologist Carl Rogers (1902 - 1987) was the founding father and principal theorist of the person-centred approach which he began formulating in the 1940's. Rogers was one of a group of psychologists, including Abraham Maslow, Rollo May and others, whose ideas became known collectively as humanistic psychology, and were seen as a radical challenge to the rather pessimistic or mechanistic views of humanity expressed by Freud and Skinner respectively (Merry, 1995, p.4-6). The whiff of radicalism still clings to the approach today. There are a number of characterising concepts that underpin the person-centred approach, the most important of which here are:

- given the right environment human beings will inevitably develop in a positive and socialising direction and towards greater differentiation, complexity and fulfilment of potential.
- that persons have the right to self determination.
- human nature is essentially social.
- self regard is a basic human need.
- persons are motivated to seek the truth.
- the person is constantly in process – not fixed or static.
- perceptions determine experience and behaviour.

(Merry, 2000, p11, and 1999 p35; Mearns & Thorne, 1999, p20).

The person-centred approach is also seen as an essentially relational process between two or more people, in which respect for and belief in the subjective reality of the other is central.

Collectively these beliefs and attitudes have often been referred to as 'a *way of being'*, a title used by Rogers (1980) for one of his best known books. Indeed Van Kalmthout (1998a, p.14) states that "person-centred theory is first and foremost a basic philosophy or way of being."

Mindfulness sits in a very different context to the person-centred approach. It is an integral part of the Buddhist system of belief and practice first formulated by the Buddha 2500 years ago. The Buddha devised and taught an approach to end 'suffering' and to achieve this he proposed an 'eightfold path'. 'Right mindfulness' is one of the eight elements in that path (the others are such things as right action, right speech and so on). However for many mindfulness has a pivotal position on the path and is sometimes called the 'heart of Buddhist meditation' (Thera, 1962, p.7). As Nhat Hanh (1998, p.64) has said "when mindfulness is present .... the seven other elements of the eightfold path are also present". Although mindfulness may be seen as pivotal it cannot be separated from its context. Rather like the 'core conditions' of the person-centred approach it operates within an ethical and philosophical framework who's characteristics include: a positive view of the underlying nature of human beings; valuing subjective experience and experiental investigation; a view of the self as constantly in motion. Clearly mindfulness is framed in a (Buddhist) 'system of meaning'which, similarly to the person-centred approach, is seen by some as a socially radical force (Batchelor, 1997 p.109).

Mindfulness has been defined in many ways, e.g. 'nonjudgemental awareness', 'impartial watchfulness', 'bare attention' and so on. In essence it is a mind state fostered in meditation (particularly insight meditation or vipassana) that can be cultivated and systematically used to achieve insight and relieve suffering. The object is to become more skillful at staying present ('awake') rather than 'lost in thought'. A modern definition of mindfulness meditation by Santorelli (1999b. p.1) is "a highly refined, systematic attentional

strategy aimed at developing both calmness of mind and body and deep insight into an array of mental and physical conditions that inhibit an individual's capacity to respond effectively and proactively .....". Put another way Wes Nisker has said (1998, p.25) "to become archaeologists of ourselves we need a sharp tool to dig with and that tool is mindfulness". In contrast to the relational approach of person-centredness, mindfulness, although often learned in conjuction with a teacher, is essentially introspective and solitary. As with the person-centred approach mindfulness is sometimes referred to as *'a way of being'* (Kabat Zinn 1993, p.264).

**b) Rationale**

It could be said that fundamentally all forms of meditation and counselling/psychotherapy are conscious, purposeful systems for exploring the self, relating to others and the world we live in. Choice and change are implied in these systems. These might be eliminating/reducing/accepting troublesome aspects of the self, reaching greater understanding of existential dilemmas and the nature of reality, developing the full potential of the self or attaining transpersonal realisation/awakening. Each and every approach is held within a theoretical framework of some kind, the most far reaching of which could be termed "a system of meaning" (Van Kalmthout,1998a). However that is to describe a broad church and it doesn't necessarily follow that such diverse approaches are compatible in their underlying views of reality, persons, or the purpose of change.

About ten years ago I commenced training in meditation and psychotherapy more or less simultaneously. More recently my training and practice have become focused around the person-centred approach and mindfulness, both as methods of investigating myself in the world and as ways of helping others to do the same. From very early on I had a sense that these two approaches were becoming part of the same process/same 'truth' inside me and that some kind of synthesis was taking place. I became interested and concerned to know if this synthesis was theoretically sound, particularly when working professionally with other people. Therefore my personal and professional motivation in this study is to uncover my own implicit beliefs and attitudes around this topic in order to 'know' them more

comprehensively and understand whether they contain any inherent and misleading contradictions, or, as Conradi (1999, p.14) has put it, "..... to articulate the personal integration or synthesis I am already living and breathing, a synthesis of my own which already informs my life and work". In essence this is about clarifying my personal paradigm around myself and others in the world; a paradigm being "a basic set of beliefs, a set of assumptions we are willing to make, which serve as touchstones in guiding our activities.....they cannot be proven or disproven....." (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p.80). Walsh's (1980) comments are particularly relevant on this issue when he discusses the "un-recognised controlling power" of implicit paradigms for researchers, particularly if a new set of basic beliefs is superimposed on the existing but unrecognized set. The importance of this uncovering of 'personal implicit theory' for counsellors and therapists is discussed by Combs (1989), McLeod (1998, p349) and Mearnes (1997) particularly with regard to congruence, a quality which is central to both the person-centred approach and mindfulness.

Mindfulness as a healthcare approach has only been practiced in Britain for about five years and on a very limited scale. However there are now increased training opportunities and it is likely to grow and expand. Many of the people who take it up are, like myself, counsellors and therapists and the issue of theoretical compatibility is relevant to each of them. With that in mind I propose in this study to **examine the compatibility of the philosophical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the person-centred approach and mindfulness to clarify whether or not there is theoretical consistency for practitioners influenced by both approaches.** Therefore the specific research question I will be asking is: **Are the systems of meaning proposed by the person-centred approach and the Buddhist concept of mindfulness compatible?** I will be asking this question primarily from the perspective of the counsellor rather than the client, and that of the person-centred counsellor taking on mindfulness rather than vice versa. This latter because to date my professional practice has been much more that of counsellor than mindfulness teacher. 'Compatible' according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary means "able to coexist", so my concern is to understand whether these two approaches can live comfortably together without

fear of fundamental confusion or contradiction.

Moving beyond my personal/professional motivation and the concerns of person-centred/mindfulness practitioners to the wider contributions that dissertations can make within their field (Rudestam and Newton 1992), I see this study as contributing to the following debates and areas of knowledge:

- The role of spirituality in counselling/psychotherapy. There has been a vigorous debate around this over the last decade or so (West 2000) including in the person-centred literature (e.g. Thorne 1998, Van Kalmthout, 1995).
- The development of integrative/eclectic approaches to counselling and therapy, which has similarly been vigorously debated in recent years (e.g. – Hollanders, 2000; Clarkson, 1998).
- The comparison of humanistic psychology and Buddhism. Whilst there is a rich literature relating psychotherapy to meditation' including Buddhist approaches, there is a paucity of material focusing on humanistic psychology and even less on the person-centred approach.

**c) Approach, Focus, Structure**

As this study is concerned with understanding beliefs that underpin the person-centred approach and mindfulness it is clearly important to make clear the assumptions that underly this work. As Lynch (1996, p.144) has pointed out the concept of validating objective reality by statistical testing may not hold good for much 'new paradigm' qualitative research, and this study clearly falls into that category. Lynch goes on to argue that regardless of the availability of external criteria all research should demonstrate "internal consistency" i.e. a consistent logic from the philosophical basis of the research through the way it is focused and the research question(s) phrased, to the research methods chosen and on to the final conclusions drawn. He then identifies three different philosophical perspectives on the nature of reality and knowledge from which counselling researchers may clarify their own perspectives. This study clearly does not fall into perspective 1 which is concerned with objective reality. Perspective 2 is that knowledge (and therefore meaning and views of

reality) is socially constructed within societies and cultures and is founded on beliefs rather than any consistent and absolute reality. Research based on this perspective tries to "give us descriptions and explanations of reality that 'help us to go on'; that help us to live in ways that we find meaningful and purposeful" (p.146). Perspective 3 on the other hand holds "that there is an objective order and meaning to reality but that our knowledge is always partial .....we can only see as much as the linguistic and conceptual resources of our social context will allow us to see" (p.146). Lynch goes on to say that research from this perspective must seek the truth even though paradoxically truth cannot be fully verified. When considering whether this study is presented from perspective 2 or 3 I found myself unsure. It is possible to argue a case for the person-centred approach and mindfulness to be presented from either perspective. For the person-centred approach this is illustrated vividly by Mearns and Thorne (2000, p.56-61) when Mearns bases his practice on humanistic and existential beliefs and Thorne on Christian theology. Similarly Kabat-Zinn (1999) and others present mindfulness in the context of healthcare as something which is not dependent on any religious belief system or other ideology, whereas within (some) Buddhist contexts it is integral to a religious system implying "an ultimate order and meaning in life" (Lynch, p.146). Somewhat tentatively, I propose that this study is presented from Perspective 2 in that it "seeks simply to provide material that may help us to live with a sense of meaning and purpose" rather than setting out to "seek the truth" (Lynch, p.146). However I recognize that this may not be the perspective of some of the authors cited.

When considering two approaches that place so much emphasis on the experiential it seems imperative to sometimes write in the first person, examine my own views and consider how I am influencing the process. There is some tension between this experiential, process oriented approach and the constraints of an academic piece of work, e.g. in terms of structure, length and style. However, reflecting on the process and making it explicit does, I hope, make it as congruent or mindful as any other part of living.

In a study concerned with such broad topics, but with an upper word limit, I have necessarily been selective in the aspects discussed (see Chapter 2) and I made an early

decision to prise theory from practice in order to get the study to a manageable size. This was a difficult choice as both approaches place great value on the experiential, subjective, and (in the case of person-centredness) relational nature of living. Hence focusing the research question on theoretical compatibility was pragmatic and has to be seen as a limitation of this study. McLeod (1994, p.9) has observed that "doing counselling research occupies a position in the service of practice", and if the purpose of theory is to help us understand our experience, then this study will have implications for practice. It is also inevitable that the distinction between theory and practice will sometimes be blurred, especially where the separation is somewhat forced. In that context material that seems relevant to this study but is primarily concerned with practice has sometimes been relegated to appendicies, where it may be followed up if required.

Another limitation of this study is that some of what is discussed may be more widely true, for example in the generality or specificity of psychotherapy or meditation, but for reasons of space and time to research I will have to address them as if they are particular to these approaches.

Once I had finalised the research question I was able to select the topics for discussion (see 2c: Data Selection). I then grouped these under the following themes, which suggested themselves from the literature relevant to the question: a) the theoretical context in which persons are held in the world; b) the nature of the person and c) the purpose and context of change for these 'ways of being'. This also seemed a logical and progressive order to examine them in. Consequently the structure of this study is as follows:

Chapter 1 : Introduction.

Chapter 2 : Methodolgy.

Chapter 3 : Views of Reality.

Chapter 4 : Models of the Self.

Chapter 5 : The Purpose and Context of Change.

Chapter 6 : Conclusion.

Clearly this will leave out many aspects of psychotherapy and meditation in general, and the person-centred approach and mindfulness in particular, which I will attempt to clarify in Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 2 : METHODOLOGY

### a) Research Method

The purpose of this Chapter is to clarify and justify the research method used in this study, including how the data were collected and which were selected for inclusion. Relevant ethical considerations are also discussed.

There are two principal approaches to designing research, i.e. quantitative and qualitative, both of which are used in the social sciences and related subjects, including counselling and meditation. Quantitative methods are concerned with establishing 'objective' truth, and must deal with data that are numerically measureable, e.g. by experimentation or statistical analysis of questionnaire results. There has been a great deal of quantitative research done on the person-centred approach in counselling and psychotherapy (eg. see Bozarth, 1998, pp.163-173). Similarly there has been much quantitative work with meditation, as can be seen from the large number of papers cited by West (1987) or Bogart (1991). However, in this work I am not concerned to establish objective truth, but rather a comparison of concepts and values. I will be dealing with constructs designed to interpret rather than demonstrate reality and therefore not responsive to quantitative methods.

However, over the last 40 years there has been a paradigm shift in the social sciences away from, and in reaction to, a mechanistic/scientific vision of human beings, towards a more subjective/phenomenological view known as the qualitative approach (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). This is based on a philosophical position that human knowledge is "contextualised and local" (McLeod, 1994, p98). Many of the criteria used for qualitative methods fit very well with the philosophical positions of the approaches being studied here e.g. holistic perspective, process orientation, and subjective validity. Also McLeod's (1994, p.78) description of the qualitative research process as one of "systematic enquiry into the meanings which people employ to make sense of their experience and guide their actions" fits

well with the aim of this study as expressed in 1(b). However, I am aware that the qualitative methodologies are aimed primarily at obtaining information from people (e.g. Maykut and Morehouse, 1994; Guba and Lincoln, 1989). I did consider whether this study could be carried out by, for example, interviewing experienced practitioners about their responses to the research question but firstly, I could not identify any experienced individuals who practiced both approaches and secondly, this might have produced narrow or conflicting views which could not have been expanded or contextualised without resorting to the literature anyway. The advantage of interviews would have been specific responses to the research question rather than having to sift views from sometimes generalised or obliquely relevant published material. On the other hand basing the study on the published literature has given me access to a wide spectrum of (English language) views from a variety of countries, in particular the United States, and across time. I therefore decided that a literature based study was the best way to address the research question.

Gordon Lynch (pers.comm.) has said that there are no published guidelines on research design and methodology for the kind of theoretical study I propose, but rather authors take structures and style from similar published studies. In support of Lynchs' view I have been unable to find any specific references to methodology or structure for theoretical studies despite having searched a number of likely sources, i.e. McLeod, 1994 and 2001; Fink, 1998; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994; Mearns and McLeod, 1984. These, and others, include details of 'literature reviews' but specifically in support of 'field' data rather than for critical analysis of the literature itself. However if I compare this study to relevant aspects of McLeod's (1994) 'criteria for evaluating the validity of qualitative research' I consider there has been a), sufficient triangulation to allow the reader to follow the line of argument from 'data' to theory b), that systematic consideration has been given to competing explanations of the 'data' c), that I have demonstrated reflexivity about the research process and d) that the

data collection, selection and presentation processes are sufficiently transparent to allow for replication. In order to satisfy the last criterion I have, despite the usual referencing convention, included page numbers, where relevant, in *all* text references to enable the reader to walk back along the 'audit trails' and re-evaluate or replicate this work (see also pp.17-18).

**b) Data Collection**

Having decided on a literature based study I had to consider which literature I needed and where and how to find it. As I trained in both approaches I already had a good collection of published material of my own. Working through these it quickly became apparent there were three principal groups of relevant literature, i.e. the person-centred approach, mindfulness and that concerned with both therapy and meditation. Some of the publications I had to hand were literature reviews or collations of papers and consequently contained extensive bibliographies, e.g. Bogart (1991), West (1987), Loizzo (1999) and Kabat-Zinn and Santorelli (1999). These set me off on a 'paper trail' working from bibliography to bibliography using material of my own and that borrowed from Chester College Library, the British Library, and from friends and colleagues. I also placed an advertisement requesting information around the research topic in the newsletter of the British Association for the Person-Centred Approach, from which I received one reply. Within a few months I had several hundred apparently relevant references. At this stage it became obvious that the material was almost limitless and that I would have to decide what to read and what to discard. To help with this I decided to time limit my searching/reading to a twelve month period ending on 31st October 2000. Parallel to deciding which information was relevant was the process of finding out precisely what I wanted to know. This involved reading widely to begin with, circling round my target and gradually refining the research question, a process which was not wholly complete until I had drafted Chapter 1. An

inevitable drawback to this evolving process was that some material read was not relevant to the final study.

Besides building up a web of cross references by searching bibliographies I also carried out some systematic searches of relevant journals.

Humanistic Psychology (USA) 1980 – 1999 (covered in Psychlit)

Transpersonal Psychology (USA) 1980-1999 (covered in Psychlit)

The Person-Centred Review (USA) 1980-1999 (covered in Psychlit)

Person-Centred Practice (UK) complete indexes

Counselling – BAC (UK) complete indexes

Tricycle – a Buddhist journal (UK) complete indexes.

In addition to these I also used the Psychlit programme with the following results using key words:

'meditation' - 1439 records

'person-centred' - 498 records

'mindfulness' - 150 records

'vipassana' - 15 records.

Both the systematic search of journals and the use of Psychlit were carried out quite late on in my search period. In effect I used them as a checking process to see if my bibliography web had been sufficiently comprehensive. Hearteningly, out of the 2000+ records thrown up by Psychlit only 8 were additional relevant references. I also visited one person-centred related website (www.adpca.org) which produced one additional relevant reference. These results suggested to me that searching bibliographies had given me a comprehensive enough sample of the literature. However there is a particular kind of bias in the literature I have searched and selected which should be bourne in mind. As this dissertation is a piece of Western academic work I needed to sample literature that could be

critically examined from that perspective. This was straight forward for the person-centred approach but, as Capra (1982, p.367) says of Eastern traditions, "they are not generally interested in explanining things but rather in the direct, non intellectual experience .....". They are more often designed to encourage self-knowledge or levels of consciousness that suggesting casual explanations (Osborne and Baldwin, 1982). Therefore, when considering mindfulness, I have frequently cited literature where Buddhist principals have been interpreted into Western psychological language, rather than drawing directly on Buddhist texts.

Deciding which references were relevant to the study was a difficult process particularly as there was virtually nothing published which directly addresses the research question, consequently I had to judge from titles and abstracts which were of value. This difficulty was highlighted when sifting the 2000 or so Psychlit references. For instance, did I ignore references to Transcendental Meditation (basically Hindu) and psychotherapy, but include those referring to Zen meditation (Buddhist) on its own? Or what about applications of meditation in humanistic psychology (therefore practice rather than theory)? It proved impossible to draw up strict criteria for inclusion/exclusion so I had to judge each on its apparent merits and read as many abstracts as I could, which was a time consuming process.

**c) Data Selection**

Looking over the material selected as relevant to the study it is apparent that quite a high proportion has come from books. This may be because journals are more inclined to publish 'hard data' research or it may be that theoretical studies are not currently fashionable. The bulk of the material selected (approx 75%) was published in the USA between 1975 and 1999. Because I did not systematically search any American journal indexes prior to 1980 I cannot be certain that there was not additional relevant material published before that date. However if there had been I would have expected West's 1987 and Bogart's 1991 reviews to

have picked it up, which they did not. There does seem to have been a genuine upsurge in interest in combined psychotherapy and meditation studies over the last 15 years. The bulk of the recent person-centred material comes from the UK, rather than the USA, which reflects the current resurgence here.

Having identified a relevant literature resource I had to decide how I was going to use it to answer the research question. The question had evolved during the research process from a very broad one to a now quite specific one. However I still needed to clarify how I was actually going to compare these two approaches to consider their compatibility. McLeod (1994, p.21-22) outlines a number of approaches to reviewing the literature, i.e. laundry list, narrative, thematic, box-score and theoretical integration. I became aware that I had always thought about these topics thematically and developmentally (i.e. starting with the wider theory and working through to practice) and my reading reinforced that. McLeod (p.21) describes the 'thematic approach' as "a highly flexible style of review, in which the complex nature of the work in an area can be respected while at the same time bringing some degree of order and organisation to the material." This catches the flavour of this study's process very well for me. McLeod (p.22) also discusses the 'theoretical integration' approach of which he says "this most difficult kind of review" is not just a matter of understanding the published material but "arriving at a fundamental re-appraisal or re-conceptualisation of a field of study". However, this study is not on exercise in integration but is more in line with post-modern notions discussed by Hollanders (2000, p.35) in which there are a "multitude of different constructions of 'what is' ". That being so Hollanders (p.35) quotes AJ Ayers as saying "there is no sense in asking what is right" but more relevant, it seems to me, is to ask what is compatible and consistent, which is what I have attempted to do here. Hollanders goes on to consider internal integration and the necessary examination of this for the individual "reflective practitioner". He describes metaphorically (p.40) the process by which

we all learn/re-learn, evaluate/revaluate, acquire/discard which I understand and experience as an ever shifting lifelong process that is an interplay between the external and internal, public and private. Therefore I offer this study as a contribution to that personal/public, individual/collective process which is never still.

Having decided on a thematic approach I had to clarify which themes to consider and which to discard. As the reading helped refine the research question so it became ever more specific to the evolving question. By the end of my search and reading period I knew what I wanted to know and where to look for the answers. In order to decide what themes to examine I used my card index of material read to float off the issues and themes discussed by the authors, and posed these against the research question. So the reading suggested the pool of themes from which I selected those that seemed most relevant to the question I was asking. Consequently I discarded the following topic areas:

1) Other schools of psychology or forms of meditation – outside the scope of this study.

2) Buddhist traditions and rituals – mostly concerned with practice.

3) Details of Buddhist psychology including altered states of consciousness – mostly concerned with the 'how' and 'why' of the awakening process (i.e. practice) rather than supporting theory. Where it touches on the latter this is addressed, (eg. 5b).

4) Outcome studies for both psychotherapy and meditation – concerned with the results of practice.

5) All other areas of practice for both approaches – in some instances theory of practice is integral to underlying theory and is addressed, e.g. relationship and change in the person-centred approach, (5c).

Because my question, which was concerned with the supporting philosophies of these two approaches, had become specific it was mostly a simple task to decide which to discard. However prising practice away from the study had been difficult, as discussed earlier, and there are undoubtedly some grey areas here. If any undeclared personal preconceptions or biases have influenced the selection of themes I have failed to spot them. As the research question arose out of an internal process between me and the reading, and the whole study is an overt extension of that process, my intention is to make that process explicit rather than objectively justifiable. If I have any overall prejudice with regard to the research question it is that I feel intuitively that these approaches are compatible. How far I go in testing the validity of that can be judged over the next four chapters.

**d) Ethical Considerations**

The principal ethical considerations in counselling and psychotherapy research revolve around power and its abuse (McLeod, 1994, p.166; Rudestam & Newton, 1992, p18), e.g. confidentiality, informed consent, manipulation of clients, etc. These are issues relating to individuals or groups involved in the research and are not relevant here so I will not discuss them further. Although ethical considerations are clearly simpler in theoretical studies they are still relevant because, as McLeod (1994, p.166) has remarked, "it is impossible to design ethically neutral research".

It is generally accepted that if material has been published, it is in the public domain and may be quoted and referred to without the authors consent as long as it is acknowledged. As I am not using any unpublished material it is not necessary for me to obtain authors consent for any work referred to. Whilst I will make every effort to avoid plagiarism and not to misinterpret the material I use, I will inevitably interpret it. I believe this interaction between me and the material is not only unavoidable but desirable; the important thing is to strive to make the process transparent. Similar to McLeod's 'replication' Guba and Lincoln (1989)

discuss "confirmability" as a parallel criterion to objectivity. They mean by this that the data can be "tracked to their sources" and the processes used in assembling the work are explicit. This being so the author or anybody else can walk back along the "audit trails" and re-evaluate and/or reconstruct the research at any time. Guba and Lincoln (p.243) refer to this process as a "dependability audit". My own thinking around this research topic will not finish with this study but will continue to evolve as will that of other researchers. In line with the qualitative research philosophy put forward earlier I see this work as "contextualised and local" (McLeod, 1994, p98), and whose conclusions "may help us to go on" (Lynch, 1996) in an ever shifting matrix of knowledge.

The only other ethical consideration that appears relevant here is to ensure socially "bias free writing" (Rudestam and Newton, 1992, p.202-205), i.e. language that is not oppressive or discriminatory, for example around gender or race.

## CHAPTER 3 – VIEWS OF REALITY

The purpose of this Chapter is to consider the compatibility of view these two approaches take towards aspects of the reality in which we live and interact. I am principally concerned with the metaphysical context that frames the self and how we respond to that. Firstly, I will explore the 'environment' of 'oneness' and spirituality and secondly, consider the influence of the universal formative and actualising tendencies within that environment.

### a) Oneness/Nonduality

In examining how mindfulness and the person-centred approach view 'oneness' or nonduality, i.e. the indivisible, interdependent nature of reality, it needs to be said that this concept has been explored and incorporated into a wide variety of fields in recent decades including physics, biology, cosmology, theology, medicine and psychology. The new scientific views of the nature of reality that arose in the first half of the twentieth century, particularly in cosmology and quantum physics, proposed an indivisible, interdependent and constantly changing universe at every level, from sub atomic waves and particles to the entire cosmos. This new holistic, dynamic, process oriented vision, or "ecological worldview" as Capra (1982) calls it, by its very nature touches all areas of life. Various writers, Capra is prominent amongst them (1982, 1983), have set out to examine its impact across disciplines. To meet the new vision of reality Capra suggests abandoning the goal of objective truth and end-points for knowledge, and proposes a network of partial ever unfolding truth in which "things exist by virtue of their mutually consistent relationships" (1982, p.365). This echos the themes of Lynch (1996) and Hollanders (2000) cited in Chapters 1 and 2. Walsh (1980), supporting the validity of Eastern philosophy, similarly draws upon the new vision of reality being advanced by quantum physics, which he describes as a "holistic indivisible, interconnected, dynamic, relativistic reality which is inseparable from and a function of the

consciousness of the observer" (p.670). Atwood and Maltin (1991) make a case for psychotherapy to develop to meet this new paradigm view of the cosmos which is seen as "one inseparable reality, forever in motion, alive, organic, spiritual and material simultaneously" (p.369). Edwards similarly (1992) argues a case for a new spiritually based psychology to meet the new paradigm, in which the search for wholeness is primary. At an individual level Kabat Zinn (1990), in his book on mindfulness based healthcare states, (p.161) "Wholeness and connectedness are what are most fundamental in our nature as living beings", and he cites various medical research to support this.

From these sources it can be seen that many branches of Western science including psychology and psychotherapy are proposing 'oneness/nonduality' as part of a new view of reality, and drawing on similar concepts in Eastern philosophies including Buddhism. Two of the principal aspects of contemplation in mindfulness meditation are the interconnected and impermanent nature of all things. Nhat Hanh (1998, p.80) when considering interdependence writes "the great body of reality is indivisible" and illustrates this (1993, p.128) by saying "if the rose is on its way to becoming garbage then the garbage is also on its way to becoming a rose". So if Western thought is beginning to endorse the Eastern concept of a dynamic indivisible interdependent reality which underpins mindfulness, what of person-centredness? A number of person-centred writers including Rogers, Merry, Van Kalmthout and Bozarth have looked at how the person-centred approach relates to this 'new paradigm'. Merry (2000b) argues that "connectedness" is a biological human need because "biological organisms and the physical environment are connected, inseparable each with the other, and evolve and develop together in a self sustaining harmonic relationship" and he draws upon the Gaia theory of the earth as a single self balancing, evolving organism to explain this. Merry believes this ecological connectedness is the source of our empathic understanding, a central human quality in the person-centred approach. He also thinks that when people are

free of "distortion or denial" they open up to experiencing themselves as both individual and integral to life on the planet simultaneously. Merry sees the person-centred 'way of being' with others as a very natural (if disciplined and skillful) way of experiencing "connectedness with our own biological nature, with the fabric of life on the planet, and with the planet itself'. He is clear that this connectedness for him has a biological not a spiritual basis. The theme of naturalness also runs through Bozarth's (1998, p.89-94) examination of 'Quantum Theory and the Person-Centred approach'. He points out that Roger's formative, tendency in the universe is similar to concepts in modern physics and that the organism responding to the actualising tendency is always in process, always adjusting and self-righting within its environment.

Rogers, particularly in his later work, saw human beings as part of an intergrated, interdependent universe, and his emphasis was on "a formative directional tendency" leading to greater order, complexity and inter-relatedness, and ultimately to "a transcendent awareness of the harmony and unity of the cosmic system, including human kind" (1980, p.133). He saw humans as being "a part of that universal struggle towards greater perfection, greater harmony" (1984, p.3) with persons "moving in the direction of wholeness, integration, a unified life" (1980, p.128). Van Kalmthout (1995) looked at the universal element in Rogers' later work and states that Rogers "considers the actualising tendency, when it is operative in individual persons, to be part of a universal force that is operative not only in human beings but in all organic life all over the cosmos" (p.23). Van Kalmthout concedes that Rogers' later thinking around universality was/is controversial in the person-centred community and seen by some to conflict with his earlier assertion of the primacy and uniqueness of the individual person and their experience.

From the above it is clear that, prompted by the new thinking in physics and cosmology, the view of an indivisible, interdependent and dynamic reality has taken root

widely in Western culture. Many writers including psychologists and psychotherapists have seen these new developments as giving validity and relevance to older Eastern philosophies, including Buddhism, in the Western world. Some person-centred writers, including Rogers (1980), have endorsed this 'ecological worldview' approach drawing particularly on modern science, but with some awareness of Eastern philosophy. They link the individual's experience with the universal and see us embedded in the dynamic flow of an evolving universal process. Merry (2000b), in particular, sees the person-centred 'way of being' as a natural way of opening up to, and experiencing, our connectedness with the universe. Catching the flavour of this, and reflecting on my own experience of the person-centred 'way of being' and mindfulness practice, I have an oft repeated sense that there is a 'rightness' of response(s) in any one moment that relates directly to this universality. I may be sitting quietly in a room responding to a client, but we are participating in a ceaseless and indivisible physical, emotional and psychological process, simultaneously involving the past and future in the endless present. This process is dynamic yet (somehow) harmonious at every level from subatomic waves and particles in my gesticulating hand to the movements of galaxies. Given sufficient openness and awareness my client and I can dance to the 'music of the spheres' in the rightness of the moment, and be "even more in tune with the evolutionary flow" (Rogers, 1980, p.127).

From the above it would seem that the person-centred approach and mindfulness each find ways of conceptualising oneness/nonduality as the enfolding context for the individual which are compatible one with the other.

**b) Spirituality**

Before addressing the compatibility of view of these two approaches in relation to spirituality it seems necessary to consider what spirituality is. For many people the word implies a religious connection, and indeed there seems always to be a spiritual element to

religion. However, since ancient times some writers have said the two are not necessarily connected (Fairhurst 2000), and in recent decades in the West spirituality has often been spoken of and written about quite independently of a belief in God or adherence to a religious creed. Characteristically of these post-modern times many of these views of spirituality are individual and see no requirement to conform to an agreed generality. That being so, I will draw on a variety of sources to help me clarify my own definition of spirituality.

Baring (1992) talks of spirituality as "a certain quality of relationship with life, one of trust and ever deepening insight and an expression of consciousness". She also considers it to be an "instinctive response" and a "natural process". This is one of the themes of Metzner (1995, p.67) who considers that our connectedness with the natural world is integral to spirituality; that "the natural is the spiritual". Irene Fairhust (2000) points out that many eminent writers have described spirituality as "connectedness, or a oneness with another", which she describes as close to her own experience except that for her it includes "awareness of connectedness". Interestingly, Merry (2000b) describes something very similar, but for him it is a "humanistic, biological view", not a spiritual one. When I asked one of my meditation teachers what she meant by spirituality she said, "It is to do with relating to the oneness of everything. It's being connected to the whole system and process and being aware of the vastness". Similarly, Atwood and Maltin (1991, p.372) refer to the spiritual as "a knowledge of one's place in the universe".

These comments and West's (2000 pp. 8-14) useful discussion on the topic have enabled me to arrive at a personal view of spirituality as: consciously relating to a vast, interdependent, universal process of which I am unavoidably part and yet cannot hope to wholely grasp. My part in this process I see as developmental in that I may grasp more, and relate more fully over time. I see this process as eternal and, in so far as I am an expression of the process, I am part of that eternity. What causes and propels the process I have no idea, but

I sense there is a 'rightness' to be grasped in any one moment which some might call 'the will of God'.

Probably most people would consider that mindfulness, as a part of Buddhism, belongs to a spiritual tradition as clearly Buddhism is a religion for many people, yet for others it is a philosophy, a system of ethics and/or a psychotherapy. Batchelor (1997, p.19) has pointed out that Buddhism embraces all of these "and can no more be reduced to any one of them than an elephant can be reduced to its tail". He prefers to consider Buddhism as a culture, "the culture of awakening", and puts forward a strong argument for "agnostic Buddhism". However, with reference to the definitions of spirituality in 3b, mindfulness is clearly concerned with awareness of, and relating to, connectedness, universal process, and allowing what 'is'. Away from the elaborations of religious Buddhism it is a pragmatic and developmental 'way of being' which is part of what is often described as a 'spiritual path', especially by Western writers (e.g. Kornfield 1994).

Whilst I consider the case for mindfulness as a spiritual activity to be fairly straight forward, that for the person-centred approach is more contentious and needs to be looked at in some detail. It is clear from his later writing that Rogers began to see his personal philosophy and the person-centred approach as embracing a spiritual dimension. In an interview for Laughing Man magazine (1984, p.3), three years before his death, he said he would now "reluctantly use the word 'spiritual' ....." as part of the whole person, and "some people who know me best tell me I am very spiritual. Maybe I am, though I don't like using religious terminology". In Rogers' last published description of a therapeutic encounter (1986b quoted by Thorne, 1992, p22) he says "I realize that this account partakes of the mystical. Our experiences, it is clear, involve the transcendent, the indescribable, the spiritual. I am impelled to believe that I, like many others, have underestimated the

importance of this mystical, spiritual dimension".

Since Rogers' death various writers have looked at the religious/mystical/spiritual aspect of his philosophy and its implications for the person-centred approach. Van Kalmthout (1995) reviewing the religious dimension of Rogers' work concludes (p.35) that "Rogers's theory in its fundamental assumptions has a true religious quality" but that the ambiguity of the word 'religious' can increase misunderstanding.

Rogers' later mystical/spiritual writings certainly proved provocative and have been described as "mediumistic", "new age" and founding texts for transpersonal psychology (Wood 1997). O'Hara (1995) described him as "the unwitting post-modern pioneer" and explains how he can be seen as a "mystic". Thorne (1998, p.37) believes that had Rogers lived longer "we would have seen a more elaborate articulation of his views around the mystical and transcendental nature of relationship", and its implication for person-centred therapy. Thorne puts a strong case for therapy/therapists to embrace a spiritual element (pp.39-41) and sees the person-centred approach as a route to transcendent/spiritual experience (pp.71-75). In a later publication (Mearns and Thorne, 2000) Thorne and his co-author Mearns explain how each has reconciled either a humanistic and essentially atheist position (Mearns), or a Christian theological view (Thorne), with person-centred therapy. Purton (1998) makes a link with spirituality and the self when he argues that if unconditional positive regard is to be genuine or unsentimental it must be directed at the "spiritual or essential self", and interestingly he makes some comparisons with Buddhist Mahayana philosophy (Note 7, p.36).

All of these views can be seen within the context raised by Van Kalmthout (1998a) that psychotherapy has, for some, replaced religion in offering a new system of meaning and both can be seen "as functionally equivalent as far as the question of the meaning of life is concerned ..... for members of contemporary society". He sees this as especially true of

humanistic therapies (pp.11-12) and goes on to develop a case for the person-centred approach to be taken out of its limited psychotherapeutic context and viewed as a philosophy which embraces "cosmic meaning" and implies (quoting Rogers) "a lifelong journey". (pp.15-16). Van Kalmthout's position seems to come close to Batchelor's views of "agnostic Buddhism" mentioned earlier.

There have been strong criticisms (see Thorne, 1992, pp. 64-77, and Van Kalmthout 1998a, pp.16, 18-19) within the person-centred community of mystical/spiritual interpretations and extensions as 'selling out' on the central concept of the supremacy of the individual and his/her experience. That argument highlights a post-modern dilemma as it could be said to be self defeating in so far as it seeks to deny the meaning (experience) others have found in the approach.

Looking back over these writers and the definitions of spirituality raised at the start of this section it would seem that once the confusion between spirituality and religion is clarified each of them is describing the same thing in their separate ways. Each is touching where the personal meets the universal and we sense a participation in some vast, mysterious and yet coherent process. Whether it is the biological interpretation of Merry, the humanistic/existential view of Mearns, the Buddhist leanings of Purton or the Christian theology of Thorne, each senses and is in awe of this process. With the possible exception of Thorne's belief in God and a specific religious creed their points of view and my own seem to sit well enough together alongside mindfulness, each like a different tent in the same encampment.

### c) The Formative and Actualising Tendencies

These two concepts were formulated by Rogers drawing on the work of other psychologists and scientists, and the actualising tendency in particular was refined throughout his working life. By the time he published 'A Way of Being' in 1980 he was able to say that

"Taken together, they are the foundation blocks of the person-centred approach" (p.114). The actualising tendency is characteristic of organic life whereas the formative tendency is "present at all levels of the cosmos, both inorganic and organic" (Van Kalmthout, 1995, p.26). Consequently the actualising tendency, which is such an important concept in the person-centred approach in relation to the health and growth of individuals, can be seen as an organic expression of the universal formative tendency. Rogers said (1980 p.133) of the formative tendency

> "I hypothesize that there is a formative directional tendency in the universe..... This is an evolutionary tendency towards greater order, greater complexity, greater inter-relatedness. In humankind, this tendency exhibits itself as the individual moves from a single-cell origin to complex organic functioning, to knowing and sensing below the level of consciousness, to a conscious awareness of the organism and the external world, to a transcendent awareness of the harmony and unity of the cosmic system, including humankind".

He also saw consciousness as "participating in this larger, creative, formative tendency". Van Kalmthout (1998a), in his paper on "person-centred theory as a system of meaning" says (p.16), "With the formative tendency, Rogers suggests that the meaning of life is to be found in the cosmos and for individuals in their participation in this evolutionary life flow". He goes on to suggest (in a description that could easily be of mindfulness meditation) that living in the flow of organismic experience

> "can provide a feeling of unity with all that exists. That is, going deep into this bodily experience one can come into contact with the universal laws of nature and thus feel part of a universal order. This means that the personal is a kind of window on the universal. By moving away from the outer world ..... into the inner world there is a union with the universal much like the mystics experience of unity with all that is".

I have quoted Rogers and Van Kalmthout at length here as together I think they illustrate how the person-centred approach has been extended from a psychology/psychotherapy to a philosophy of life, or system of meaning, which links the individual into the cosmos by way of the formative/actualising tendencies. Despite the

apparent spiritual implications here it should be stressed that these tendencies or drives are seen as natural science concepts which, despite their 'constructive' nature, are unencumbered by values. Mearns and Thorne (2000) and Merry (2000b) explain the actualising tendency as a basic biological concept which is neither good or bad "any more than there is 'good' or 'bad' in gravity" (Merry, p.1). Mearns and Thorne go on to describe it as "a growth tendency" .....and "It is a formative drive to make the most we can of our living process" (p.182).

The importance of the actualising tendency in particular, for the person-centred approach, cannot be overstated. It is seen as the sole motivator for human behaviour, change and development (Merry, 1999, p.35; Mearns and Thorne, 2000, p.181). Rogers (1957a, p.403) viewed humankinds' fundamental nature, as "positive, forward-moving, constructive, realistic and trustworthy" and our frequent estrangement from this actualising tendency as something that was 'learned'.

Whilst this 'growth tendency' is familiar enough in the sense of acorn to oak tree or baby to adult it should be remembered that the actualising tendency refers to the whole integrated person in all their physiological, emotional, cognitive (and spiritual) aspects. It is a lifelong motivational force which cannot be destroyed without destroying the organism itself (Rogers, 1977, p.8). Bozarth (1998, pp.29-30), when considering the characteristics of the actualising tendency, uses words such as "individual and universal, holistic, ubiquitous and constant, a directional process." The directional characteristic is especially interesting in the context of this study. Bozarth (p.29), quoting Rogers, amplifies this as "a tendency towards realisation, fulfilment, and perfection of inherent capabilities and potentialities of the individual".

The implications of all of this for the person-centred practitioner is that there is one (multi-faceted) innate and positive direction in life which, although it may become distorted,

cannot be prevented. So in order to 'make the most of ourselves' we need to dwell in that inner organismic life flow which is the process of actualisation.

Turning to mindfulness and Buddhism I can find no parallel concepts to the actualising and formative tendencies. There is no clearly identified force or power, like that of God, evolution, or destiny. Buddhists do talk of path (the Noble Eightfold Path) as a metaphor and, like the person-centred approach, this is a process, the point is to travel not to arrive. In Buddhism there are always potentials, opportunity, purpose and methodology, and there is much written about diligence, effort, concentration and skill, but there is no explicit universal directional or motivational force. Each of us is said to possess a fundamental 'buddha-nature' (See Chapter 4) which is inherently good (Trungpa, 1985, p.126), and therefore each of us has the capacity to become a buddha; the seed is unavoidably within us and can be cultivated (Nhat Hanh, 1998, p.187). However the buddha-nature just 'is' and the point is to 'uncover' it and to see life as it truly is. As Levine has said (1993, p.6) "Our natural state of being ..... is like the sun which is always shining, always present, though often obscured". Elsewhere Nhat Hanh (1993, p.79) seems to come closer to the person-centred position saying "when the lamp of mindfulness is lit up the mental formations under observation will naturally transform in a wholesome direction". Brazier (1995, p.33) makes a specific link with person-centred concepts when he says "trusting the buddha-nature" is "similar to the humanistic idea that there is a reliable constructive growth process called the 'actualising tendency'." Similarly Kornfield (1994, P.37) writes of "a force of life that is unstoppable", and that by taking up a spiritual life "each of us awakens this force".

It is sometimes said that Buddhism has nothing to say about God, either for or against the existence of such an entity, being or force, and perhaps the formative and actualising tendencies, natural science concepts though they are, have similarities with some conceptualisations of God. Certainly for me the extended quotes earlier in this section from

Rogers and Van Kalmthout have a spiritual element and I have no problem in finding room for both the spiritual and scientific in my own belief system. However, there is an apparent difference here between mindfulness and the person-centred approach in so far as the formative/actualising tendencies are very clearly directional. Mindfulness is about experiencing what 'is' here now and that's it. Welwood (1980, p.131) a Buddhist psychotherapist says, when comparing mindfulness meditation and Gendlins's focussing methodology, that both can put us in touch with "a natural momentum of growth and change which seems to be available whenever we remove obstacles to it". So perhaps a positive, growthful tendency is there in Buddhism but not formally expressed. However, it may be that the apparent differences in this area between the two approaches are more to do with cultural expression than real conceptual differences (see Appendix 2 for further discussion). There is certainly a goal in Buddhism (see Chapter 5) so from a Western perspective it is hard to resist the notion of a 'direction'.

In this chapter we have seen that both the person-centred approach and mindfulness sit within concepts of a holistic, non-dual universe in which individuals are part of a interdependent, dynamic process that affects every level of reality. Both can be seen as spiritual activities if that is your viewpoint, although this is generally more contentious in the person-centred community than with mindfulness. The concepts of the formative and actualising tendencies are fundamental to the person-centred approach but there appears to be no equivalent force or tendency in Buddhism. However, there is sufficient conceptual overlap for this to be considered as a difference of cultural expression rather than a fundamental conflict of view.

## CHAPTER 4 : MODELS OF THE SELF

Having considered in Chapter 3, the context that frames the self and the drive (in the person-centred approach) that motivates it, I now want to examine how each of these approaches conceptualises the self, its internal components and mechanisms, and whether these models are compatible.

### a) The Person-centred Approach

The person-centred approach envisions an 'organismic valuing process', i.e. a continuous, largely out of awareness, assessment of experience as to whether it threatens or enhances the individual. Prompted by the actualising tendency to move in a positive and developmental direction the organismic valuing process would, under ideal environmental circumstances, enable the individual to respond in a spontaneous, authentic and life enhancing manner to changing experience. Person-centred theory considers that this intrinsic internal valuing process is totally trustworthy and can be relied upon to prompt behaviour that is in the person's best interest (after Merry, 1995, 1999; Mearns and Thorne, 1999). In non-technical terms it can be seen as 'instinctively knowing what is best for yourself'. As human infants develop they begin to separate out 'I/me' experience from 'non-me' experience and build up an internal picture of themselves, which is constantly updated as life progresses. This complex multi-faceted picture of self is known as the 'self-concept' in person-centred terminology, and is used throughout life as a kind of 'I/me database' against which to measure the positive, neutral or negative merits of 'incoming' experience. Under ideal environmental conditions a person's self-concept would be completely in line with the authentic and developing needs identified by their organismic valuing process. In such circumstances a person could be said to have an 'ideal self-concept' (Merry, 1995 p.24).

As human infants develop they begin to experience the need for love and protection, i.e. positive regard from others, particularly parents or their equivalent. They also need to

develop positive self-regard in order to be able to trust and rely on their own evaluations of experience. However, in order to ensure survival through the provision of food, shelter, warmth etc. the dependent child will often allow the compelling need for positive regard from others to override the authentic promptings of the organismic valuing process, and so behave inauthentically in a way that is designed to please. In that way parents and significant others can greatly influence our view of ourselves in the world by withholding or threatening to withhold love and protection, and we are apt to internalise their value systems in a complex series of 'conditions of worth'. This process of sometimes choosing the incongruent (inauthentic) option driven by the internalised conditions of worth means that the self-concept becomes less or more in line with a person's authentic needs depending on environmental circumstances. In person-centred theory it is the dissonance between our congruent (authentic) needs and the incongruent aspects of our self-concept that causes neuroses, self destructive behaviour etc., or in Buddhist terms 'suffering'. It is through the lens of the self-concept that we view the world, consequently some experience is distorted or denied, seen not as it really is, and in this way reality is what we perceive it to be rather than constant and objectively true (Merry, 1995 p.25). In fact Carl Rogers proposed there were as many realities as there are individuals to perceive them (1980, pp.96-108).

Rogers equated the terms 'self', 'self structure' and 'self concept' (Mearns and Thorne, 2000, p.174), and he saw the self not as a fixed entity but an ever changing product of the person's response to their experience (Thorne, 1992, p.29). He described this as a

> "conceptual gestalt composed of perceptions of the characteristics of the 'I' or 'me' and the perceptions of the relationships of the 'I' or 'me' to others and to various aspects of life, together with the values attached to those perceptions" (Rogers, 1959, p.200).

Thorne (p.29) further simplifies this as "I am the self which I currently conceptualise myself as being". He emphasises that this 'current conceptualisation' will arise from the

imprint of all past experience interacting with that of the present moment, which will then 'update' the self (concept), only for it to be reassessed again in the next moment of experiencing. In this way Rogers saw the self (concept) as "a fluid and changing gestalt, a process, but at any given moment it is a specific entity ....." (Rogers, 1959, p.200). It should also be said that this model of the self incorporates only conscious or in-awareness experience, in contrast to some other psychological models which would include or emphasise unconscious material. However, Mearns and Thorne (2000, p.175) have recently proposed that person-centred theory be extended to add "edge of awareness" experience to the self-concept as a definition of self.

If the self is equated with the self-concept in the person-centred approach does this imply there is no 'thing' beyond it other than the promptings of the actualising tendency as sensed by the organismic valuing process; and if so is the actualising tendency an individual or universal expression? In person-centred circles there is often talk (although not by Rogers it seems) of the 'organismic' or 'real' self, as if there is a particular and individual self of which the overlying self-concept is a partially distorted version. It's hard to find an explanation or definition of an organismic/real/true self in person-centred writing. In a recent paper entitled 'The Fallacy of the Real Self', Tolan (2001) argues that there is only "organismic experiencing" rather than an organismic self, and that this experiencing may be unmodified, distorted or denied in the self-concept.

Van Kalmthout (1998b, p.58-59) states that "personality change in a person-centred perspective means becoming your real, true, organismic self" but admits that it is hard to say just what that is. He points out that in some humanistic and transpersonal circles the word is capitalised as the 'Self' implying "a divine entity seated within us" (p.58). However, Van Kalmthout considers that abstract theoretical consideration of the self is far removed from our actual experiencing of ourselves and liable to lead to "thing-like conceptualisation" (p.59).

He emphasises that the person-centred approach envisions self as a process rather than a structure, and makes the interesting statement that "Daring to live in the here and now of the experiential process (instead of the fixed, conditioned patterns of the past) is the essence of this true self" (p.59). Drawing on the work of Rosenbaum and Dyckman (1995) he goes on to say that this ever changing, fluid concept of self reminds him of the Buddhist concept of the 'empty self', and that if we assume "that self has no core identity or unchanging essence then we can see the self as an on-going ever changing manifestation of potentiality" (p.59). Van Kalmthout sees this dis-identification with a fixed self (concept) as very liberating, offering an opportunity for positive change. He also argues that acceptance of an 'empty' self offers relatedness to others since if all experience arises from the same universal source we must all be intimately connected.

Purton (1998), who is a Buddhist scholar as well as a person-centred author, argues for an "essential self" of which the "empirical self" is a distorted version, I presume comparable to the self-concept. He argues that in order to offer a person unconditional positive regard (a core attribute in person-centred practice) that is not merely sentimental we must recognise an essential self beyond the empirical self, as the latter sometimes may not be worthy of our respect. Purton goes on to argue that logically this essential self must have boundaries beyond this life and is therefore spiritual in nature. Just how he envisions this essential self is not clear to me. He says (p.35) that beyond the empirical self "the remainder of the truth is not empirical at all; it is a matter of faith, of hope, of the spiritual imagination." In an interesting footnote (7, p.36) he invites comparison of the essential self with the buddha-nature said by Buddhists to be present in all of us (see pp.40-41 of this study) but admits that the absolute nature of this concept is controversial in Buddhist (Mahayana) philosophy.

It would seem that whilst the person-centred approach is clear that psychological

disturbance originates from the dissonance between authentic and inauthentic thoughts, feelings and behaviour and has sophisticated and sometimes elegant theories about how this may be managed or resolved, it is not nearly so clear about from where or how these authentic expressions originate. Rogers (1959) postulated the self as "a fluid and changing gestalt" a kind of process-self prompted by the actualising tendency which is linked to, or an expression of, the universal formative tendency. Tolan's (2001) view is that there is only organismic experiencing but she does not speculate on how, or from 'where', this originates except to say that it is "neutral". Van Kalmthout (1998b) subscribes to the 'self as process' viewpoint seeing the self as "an ongoing ever changing manifestation of potentiality" without exploring the implications of 'potentiality'. Purton and Thorne (1998) in different ways see a self which, at least in part, is an expression of the spiritual, of something greater than the empirical manifestations of an individual. To these can be added the humanistic/biological and atheist views of Merry and Mearns explored in Chapter 3.

It appears that most person-centred writers who have considered the origins of the self have a sense of ultimate mystery, of there being more of ourselves than we can easily account for, and that this is often experienced in relationship with others. What this 'more' is seems to be open to the interpretation of the individual's viewpoint, and a wide variety of interpretations may be tolerated in the post-modern era. This is reinforced by the work of Holdstock (1993) and to some extent Moore (2000) who argue that person-centred views of the self are anyway culturally bound and (Holdstock) in need of revision.

**b) The Buddhist Approach**

The short answer to describing the Buddhist view of self is that there is no such thing. As Thera (1962, p.51) has said ".....the deepest and most obstinate delusion in man : his belief in a self, a soul, or any eternal substance of any description. This delusion, with its offspring of craving and hatred, is the true motive power of .....suffering". What we

regard as the self Buddhists see as a flowing, ever changing, interconnected process, a stream of passing thoughts, feelings and physical sensations that arise from and disappear back into 'the void'. Nothing is solid and all is connected in an interdependent arising (Kornfield, 1994, p. 200-203). Consequently there is no fixed self but more "an interactive cluster of processes" (Batchelor, 1997, p.67). One of the great 'truths' of Buddhism is the impermenance of all things, including the self. For experiential evidence of this practitioners are advised to sit quietly with eyes closed and notice their experience. This invariably turns out to be an ever shifting pattern of largely unbidden thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations which vary in tone, power and duration. These can be seen to have arisen from, and are co-dependent upon, a wide variety of environmental circumstances which are viewed through the lens of the individuals' history to date.

Another cornerstone belief in Buddhism is the interdependence of all things. For example (to paraphrase Thich Nhat Hanh) the logger, truck driver, paper-mill worker, student and college tutor are all dependent on this piece of paper as it is dependent on them. Likewise each of these is dependent on the soil, sun and rain which the tree converts to timber, the source of the pulp for the paper. And they have not gone away but are present here in this sheet of paper as I write, because without them I could not. All things in all things; so it is with self. As Batchelor (1997, p.75) puts it "I have emerged from causes and am composed of changing features and traits. There is no essential me that exists apart from this unique configuration of biological and cultural processes". To experience this impermanent, interdependent state of reality is one of the great goals of Buddhist meditation. As Nhat Hanh (1998, p.134) says "When we see that everyone and everything belongs to the same stream of life then our suffering will vanish". It is our efforts to hold on to a fixed and separate self that causes us to constantly want things to be other than they are, and we react by pushing away (aversion) or grasping on to (attachment), so it is that we suffer

(Purton, 1996, p.461, Golstein and Kornfield, 1987, p.56)

It might seem that this apparently kaleidoscopic non-separate stream of experience observed by consciousness is inadequate to explain our sense of self. However the Buddhist concept of non-self is essentially about there being no *fixed* self; it does not mean we don't exist but refers more to "the underlying non-separation of life and the fertile ground of energy that gives rise to all forms of life" (Kornfield, 1994, p.200). In fact Kornfield, who is a therapist as well as a Buddhist teacher, goes on to say we need to "develop a healthy sense of self", in order to function well in the world. Indeed many of the central objectives of Buddhism such as compassion and wisdom are developed within and manifested by the self/self concept. How the self (concept) is structured and functions remains elusive in Buddhist terms due to its perceived shifting, impermanent non-separate nature. Batchelor (1997, p.79) describes vividly trying to identify his self. "I find it's like trying to catch my own shadow .....Each time I think I've pinned it down it turns out to be something else: a bodily sensation, a mood, a perception, an impulse, or simply awareness itself..... The self may not be something, but neither is it nothing. It is simply ungraspable, unfindable".

I find the theoretical concepts of non-self and developing a healthy self (concept) paradoxical. Indeed Kornfield (1994 p.205) says "Both sides of the apparent paradox must be fulfilled for us to awaken". However in practice, through meditation, I can experience the kaleidoscopic, every shifting, inter-dependent sensation of self, and occasionally I glimpse a great inner space, 'the ground of being', from which I sense all of that flows. I also experience some (shifting) consistency of 'me' from day to day, year to year, including a capacity to make changes to my self through conscious endeavour. This paradoxical, 'not fully understood' position is a very respectable one in Buddhist meditation which is an essentially experiential process rather than theoretical discipline. Kornfield, (1994, p.200) quotes the Buddhist master Achaan Chah, when talking about 'emptiness' of the self, as

saying "If you try to understand it intellectually your head will probably explode."

There has been a vigorous debate amongst Buddhist oriented psychologists, particularly those with a psychodynamic background, about the apparent need to dissolve the ego in order to experience 'non-self' or 'emptiness'. Some Western psychotherapists have postulated that this can only be done if the ego is strong/strengthened (which is often seen as the purpose of psychotherapy), a view summed up in Jack Engler's well known phrase 'you have to be somebody before you can be nobody'. Some, notably Epstein (1988 and 1998, p84-88) and Engler (1984), argue that transcending the ego would surrender being human and that true egolessness equals psychosis. Epstein argues that in fact vipassana meditation does not dissolve the ego but loosens its boundaries so it is no longer so obsessed with its own solidity. Through that process the "self concept" becomes increasingly insubstantial the more it is examined, but it is only by containing these experiences within the ego that "disintegration is prevented". This view is supported by Urbanowski and Miller (1996, p.44) who discuss using mindfulness meditation to create "a powerful healing modality which strengthens the ego as well as inviting experiences of egolessness". These arguments are relevant here as they suggest that, if the ego is roughly equated with the self-concept, then it is not necessary to 'dissolve' or go entirely beyond the self-concept in order to experience authenticity, or being 'the person who you truly are'.

If then, there is no fixed self in Buddhist psychology what is it that we rest on or arise from? As touched upon in Chapter 3 this seems to be the concept of 'buddha-nature' (buddhata). To better understand this concept it is worth quoting Brazier (1995, p33-35),

> "If the universe is in some sense whole, then we are part of something greater than self. Buddhata, therefore, is not really something possessed by an individual. It is, rather one way of expressing the idea that we are all part of one another. Our Buddha nature is our participation in the cosmos and is the cosmos participating in us. It is the spiritual dimension of existence : 'the other power'. Buddhata is a self transcending tendency rather than a self-actualising one".

Both Brazier and particularly Kornfield (1994 p.209-212) describe a process of trusting or uncovering our buddha-nature. This is experienced by 'letting go' (of a fixed self) rather than 'working towards'. As Kornfield says (p.209) "we do not have to improve ourselves; we just have to let go of what blocks our heart" (i.e. our sense of a fixed self) and then our "fundamental goodness" will be revealed. The universal qualities of our buddha-nature (fearlessness, connectedness, integrity, belonging etc) will "shine through each of us, evolving out of the individual set of patterns in each person ....(which) we could call our character, our destiny, our individual path to fulfil" (p.211). So this is a vision of expressing the universal, the fundamental, through the shifting, evolving, interdependent and yet distinctive self. It seems that we are moved to do this because that is who we truly are and therefore want to be. It is by letting go, relaxing our grip on the illusion of fixed self, that we come home to our true nature.

**c) Are They Compatible?**

In examining the models of self proposed by the person-centred approach and Buddhism, some areas of overlap are quickly self evident. Both propose a description and experience of self that is fluid and shifting moment to moment, rather than a fixed entity. Both suggest that it is our view of ourselves in the world which causes us to suffer, by clinging to a fixed or conditioned self and so distorting or denying reality. Both propose some kind of basic nature or trustworthy guidance from within which arises from or is linked to something beyond the individual, and is common to all.

When it comes to self-as-process these two approaches seem very compatible. Descriptions like the self as "a fluid gestalt, a process but at any given moment it is a specific entity" (Rogers 1959, p.200) and "Daring to live in the here and now of the experiential process (instead of the fixed, conditioned patterns of the past) is the essence of this true self" (Van Kalmthout, 1998b, p.59) are very similar conceptually, and even in style and

vocabulary, to a Buddhist writer such as Batchelor (1997, e.g. pp 24-25, 69, 75). The terminology is confusing (self-concept, self structure, true self, process self, empirial self are all used for similar concepts), but both models see our misinterpretation of ever shifting experience as the source of suffering, and both imply that it is potentially within our grasp to see life as it truly is.

As I understand the person-centred literature, although there is talk of an organismic self beyond the self concept, this is not described or really intended. Some of the confusion probably arises because the word 'self' for me, and I suspect many others, conjours up the notion of a fixed entity. Kornfield's (1994) term 'true nature' seems to describe better what Rogers intended when describing the prompting of the actualising tendency within the framework of our genetic inheritance. 'True nature' is also more compatible with the Buddhist term 'buddha-nature', which also seems to describe a collective or universal source within each of us. So in my view neither model proposes a 'real self' in any ordinary sense of the term.

That however is not the position put forward by Rowan (1983, 2001) who says the notion of the 'real self' is one of the most characteristic of humanistic psychology, the aim of which is to enable a person to get in touch with their real self (1983, pp.57-70). I am not clear what he means by the real self despite his considerable discussion of the topic (e.g. 2001 p212-214). He proposes a number of models from a variety of sources but fails to encapsulate the concept in a way I can grasp, although integration (physical and psychological) and authenticity seem to be important characteristics. Similar to Rowan, Brazier (1995, p.33-35), who is a Buddhist and humanistic psychotherapist, argues that a difference between Buddhism and humanistic psychology is that the latter recognises/defines a real self and the former says that there is no self at all. He also says "trusting the Buddha nature is similar to the humanistic idea that there is a reliable, constructive growth process

called the 'actualising tendency'.

As discussed earlier, whilst I agree with Brazier that there are important even profound parallels between the actualising tendency and buddha-nature, I cannot agree with him or Rowan that, at least in the person-centred approach, there is a recognised or defined 'real self'. Furthermore although person-centred practice may appear to be concentrating on the self (concept) rather than moving beyond it, it is in fact trying to help the individual develop enough awareness to bring their experience of themselves more in line with their authentic, organismic experience. This awareness is fostered by cultivating moment to moment sensing of experience as it happens, in relationship. This seems to me very similar to the process of mindfulness and Buddhist meditation where the individual endeavours to let go of a rigid view of themselves and experience the fluidity of experience resting on the trustworthiness of their buddha-nature. Brazier argues that the humanistic approach and Zen (Buddhism) also differ in this area because firstly, Zen emphasises the transpersonal aspect of the buddha-nature and secondly because, unlike the humanistic approach, it does not regard the buddha-nature as a "definite entity". As we have seen earlier a number of writers find room for the transpersonal within the person-centred view of the self, and as already discussed I can find no "definite entity" beyond the self concept. Given these assertions I can see no significant obstacles to the compatibility of the two approaches regarding models of the self.

My own experience of this process of self is that when I respond to the world around me, I make my choices moment to moment from a frame of reference governed by my genetic potential and constraints, my accumulated history-to-date including personal and cultural values, my biological condition (age, health etc), and crucially the quality of my awareness in the moment. Beyond these it seems to me I can also refer to a felt-sense of what is 'right' in that moment by drawing on more than myself, i.e. the actualising

tendency/buddha-nature. This process allows me to sense what is right for me-in-my-environment given that these are inseperable and interdependent. It seems there are choices that lead to dissonance and those that lead to harmony. The point is to move, however haltingly, towards more frequently choosing the latter.

## CHAPTER 5 : THE PURPOSE AND CONTEXT OF CHANGE

Having looked, in Chapter 3, at various aspects of reality in which the self is held and then, in Chapter 4, at models of the self, in this Chapter I will to consider the 'purpose' of these two approaches and the context within which that is 'pursued'. Firstly I will examine the goals and aims of both approaches and discuss the notions of change surrounding these. Following that I will consider the implications of 'relationship' as a theoretical component of the context of change.

### a) Goals: Fully Functioning and Awakening

As was clear from Chapter 4 the underlying thrust of the person-centred approach is for persons to be more closely in touch with their undistorted experiencing and the actualising process, and consequently less governed by any distortion or denial integral to their self- concepts. Using the words of the philosopher Kierkegaard, Rogers encapsulated the goal of this process as, "to be that self which one truly is" (1961, p.166). Further on (p.176) he expands on this,

> "It seems to mean that the individual moves towards *being*, knowingly and acceptingly, the process which he inwardly and actually *is* ..... He is increasingly listening to the deepest recesses of his physiological and emotional being, and finds himself increasingly willing to be, with greater accuracy and depth, that self which he most truly is".

After many years of observing psychotheraphy clients Rogers saw a positive direction or movement in them away from certain negative states towards certain positive characteristics which he termed 'fully functioning'. However, it is important to emphasise that he saw this movement as a process not a destination, so that for him the fully functioning person would always be flowing and changing rather than fixed or determined. As Merry states (1999, p.21) "All of Rogers' theories concerned a continuing process of change and movement towards more openness to experience and the concept of 'self' as tentative and

dynamic". However, in recognition of the implied end-point of actualisation Rogers spelt out the characteristics of his hypothetical fully functioning person in various publications and these have been usefully summarised by Merry (1999, p.28) as:

- be open to experience
- exhibit no defensiveness
- be able to interpret experience accurately
- have a flexible rather than static self-concept open to change through experience
- trust in his or her own experiencing process and develop values in accordance with that experience
- have no conditions of worth and experience unconditional self-regard
- be able to respond to new experience openly
- be guided by his or her own valuing process through being fully aware of all experience, without the need for denial or distortion of any of it
- be open to feedback from his or her environment and make realistic changes resulting from this feedback
- live in harmony with others and experience the rewards of mutual positive regard.

These characteristics are best seen as the theoretical (and probably unobtainable) end-point had the actualising process always been unimpeded, or where negative conditioning has been completely overcome. In such circumstances the "actualised person" (Merry 1999, p.28) would display these characteristics. These are further distilled by Thorne (1992, p.34) into three defining characteristics of a fully functioning person, i.e. increasing openness to experience; an ability to live fully in the present; trusting ones own organismic experiencing.

So it can be seen that the goal of the person-centred approach is "to be that self which one truly is" (Rogers, 1961, p.166 quoting Kierkegaard) which, although individual, will display certain "directional tendencies" (Rogers, 1959) expressed by an open and fluid self responding to an ever changing environment and the positive, forward-moving and

constructive promptings of the actualising tendency. Rogers saw the basic nature of human beings, when functioning freely in this way, as constructive and trustworthy and that "affiliation and communication" with others is one of our deepest needs. Consequently he regarded it as inevitable that a fully functioning person would be appropriately and constructively socialised (Rogers, 1961, p.194).

The goal of Buddhism can be said to be the release from [1] 'suffering' and the Buddha taught a detailed and sophisticated 'methodology' for individuals to achieve that end. Centrally he spoke of the Four Noble Truths – recognising suffering, recognising the origins of suffering, recognising the possibility of the cessation of suffering, and the (eight-fold) path to the cessation of suffering. The eight elements of the path are [2] right mindfulness, right concentration, right view, right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right diligence. The Buddha also taught of the Seven Factors (characteristics) of Awakening (Buddhists love counting!) which are: mindfulness, investigative curiosity, diligence, joy, ease, concentration and equanimity. With regard to mindfulness there are the Four Establishments (Objects) of Mindfulness which provide a profound system of being present and contemplation which embraces everything in the cosmos. The Buddha said "By practising the Four Establishments of Mindfulness you will realise the Seven Factors of Awakening" (Nhat Hanh, 1998, p.216). The awareness and insight developed through mindfulness can lead to the cessation of suffering or 'freedom'. This is particularly with regard to the causes of suffering which are said to be craving (for things to be different, expressed through attachment and aversion) and ignorance (delusion, not seeing things as they really are, particularly with regard to the self). The end-point of realising and

[1] Suffering is a translation from Pali and in this context does not equal physical or emotional pain but is more like disharmony, confliction or estrangement. Purton (1996, p.455) talks of "unsatisfactoriness".
[2] 'Right' here is not a moral judgement as in right or wrong but rather meaning in the right way, straight or upright. Through our own awareness we discover what is inherently right – for that moment (Nhat Hanh 1998, p.11).

embodying the disciplines and insights arising from these, and other, Buddhist practices is said to be awakening, enlightment or liberation. However, as with fully functioning in the person-centred approach, awakening is seen as a process rather than a destination. As Nhat Hanh (1998, p.215) has said "Enlightment is growing all the time, it is not something that happens once and is then complete". Goleman (1981, pp. 132-3) states that the personality end-point of the awakening process is the Arhant (a saint like person), a prototype figure also present in Western religion but notably absent in Western psychology. However he goes on to say that "one of the closest fits for the characteristics of the Arhant personality is Maslow's self actualised person". Goleman's description of an Arhant (p.132) is reminiscent of Rogers' fully functioning person in so far as it represents a seemingly unattainable ideal.

It is important to emphasise that fundamentally the Buddhist path towards the goal of awakening is practical and experiential i.e. a way of discovering truth through your own experience, rather than doctrinal, despite the elaborations of religious Buddhism. As Batchelor says (1997, p.7) "The four enabling truths are not propositions to believe; they are challenges to act." Kornfield (1994, pp. 332-339) makes a case for awakening as a process that is available right here and right now, despite all that has been written about it and super-imposed upon it, and he quotes the Buddhist texts (p.333),

> "Awakening is not something newly discovered; it has always existed. There is no need to seek or follow the advice of others. Learn to listen to that voice within yourself just here and now ..... If you cannot find the truth right where you are, where else do you think you will find it?"

It is being in touch with ourselves-in-our-world in this moment in an open and unconstricted way that is to be 'awake', to be "intimate with all things" (Kornfield, 1994, p.332).

If the goal of the person-centred approach is 'to be that self which one truly is' and that of Buddhism the 'cessation of suffering', are these compatible, at least in theory? It is

difficult to compare fully functioning with awakening because the former is described as a set of characteristics or healthy internal mechanisms, the latter is described in a variety of ways including courses of action, realisation of certain insights, as well as individual characteristics.

There is however some scope for comparing the universal 'diagnosis' which underlies these respective goals as Purton (1996) has shown in his paper on 'The Deep Structures of the Core Conditions'. He says that clients come to client-centred therapy due to a deep sense of "unsatisfactoriness" which therapy (it is hoped) will help translate into a more satisfactory state of being. Client-centred therapy has a theory that explains this process as one of losing touch with ourselves, as described in Chapter 4. In this way it is the incongruence between our experience and self-concept that is the cause of the felt 'unsatisfactoriness'. This alienation from ourselves, as Purton puts it, prevents genuine self respect and self understanding, and diminishes our ability to understand and respect others. Consequently there is, he says (p.456), a single aim of client-centred therapy i.e. "client congruence". This conclusion is supported by Mearns and Thorne (2000, p.198) who say "The briefest possible summary of person-centred therapy is that it is a process which facilitates the client's congruence".

Purton goes on to consider the goal of Buddhism in practice which he sees as "the release from suffering"(= unsatisfactoriness). Suffering is rooted in 'craving' (grasping onto, or pushing away) and 'ignorance' (delusion), which is rooted in deep misconception of the nature of oneself and the world. He concludes that although both client-centred therapy and Buddhism start with 'unsatisfactoriness', which superficially may be certain attachments or fears (anxiety, anger, sadness etc.), the deep cause as identified by their respective theories is that the "person misperceives and hence mis-lives what they really are". This does seem to

represent a fundamental convergence of reasoning and therefore compatibility of goal. However this may only be a convergence at some levels, as will be discussed in section (c).

Commitment to these goals has considerable implications for the lives of practitioners which, being largely concerned with practice, are outside the main body of this study, however some discussion of this is provided in Appendix 1.

### b) Aims: Psychological and Spiritual Development

Having examined the goals of these two approaches I will now consider the aims that underlie these, and whether they are compatible. The two aims frequently discussed in the literature, in relation to psychotherapy and meditation, are psychological and spiritual development.

That the person-centred approach has an aim of psychological development can, I think, be taken as given here without further elaboration. Also, as can be seen from the discussion in 3(b), some writers such as Rogers (latterly), Thorne and Van Kalmthout find spirituality to be integral to the practice of person-centred therapy. Thorne (1998, pp.39-50) makes a passionate case for counsellors and therapists to face up to the responsibility of embracing a spiritual dimension in their work. Van Kalmthout (1995, p.29) talks about the "inner force (is) present in all organic and inorganic life and, as far as the individual person is concerned, estrangement can be wiped away by taking part in this cosmic life force. To help people live in that force is the purpose of therapy." In the light of the definitions of spirituality in 3(b) it seems to me that this kind of interpretation of person-centred therapy must allow for it to be a vehicle for spiritual development. Whilst other therapists such as Merry (2000b), do not see their work as a spiritual activity (as opposed to addressing spiritual matters raised by clients) this seems to be more a matter of personal choice than absolute

incompatibility. As Mearns and Thorne demonstrate (2000, pp.54-72) there is room for both the secular and spiritual within the approach without absolute contradiction. More pertinent perhaps, although outside the scope of this study, is the consideration that, although the person-centred approach provides a sophisticated and well developed theory of practice for psychological development, it only opens a doorway to spiritual development (for some), beyond that there is no further guidance. Within Western psychologies, one would have to turn, in particular, to transpersonal psychology to find a theoretical structure that embraces spiritual dimensions (e.g. Rowan, 1993).

As with person-centredness and psychological development some might consider it obvious that mindfulness has spiritual development as an aim. If Buddhism were your religion then mindfulness would be part of it, and therefore connected to your spiritual development. I think it likely that most non-Buddhists with a mindfulness meditation practice would have a belief system that fell within the definitions of spirituality put forward in 3(b), and that being so one of the aims of mindfulness would be spiritual development. Certainly it is hard for *me* to imagine contemplation of the interconnected, impermanent nature of all things without embracing the spiritual.

Batchelor however (1997, pp.14-20), in making his case for agnostic Buddhism, says (17) that the Buddha's teachings, of which mindfulness is a part, "may have more in common with Godless secularism than with the bastions of religion". In his chapter 'Is Mindfulness Spiritual?' (1994, pp.263-270) Kabat-Zinn is very wary of the term. He has developed and promoted the use of mindfulness as a pragmatic healthcare approach, particularly in hospitals and other medical settings (see Kabat-Zinn, 1990), and is very concerned that this approach should not have any religious undertones. He also sees the word 'spiritual' as a kind of deluded escape hatch for those that want to avoid reality – the opposite of his intention. He,

(along with Walsh, 1980 and others) prefers to see mindfulness as a "consciousness discipline" rather than a "spiritual practice" (1994, p.264). Further on he says "perhaps ultimately, spiritual simply means experiencing wholeness and interconnectedness directly, a seeing that individuality and the totality are interwoven, that nothing is separate or extraneous. If you see it this way, then everything becomes spiritual in its deepest sense". In terms of this study that is a statement in favour of, rather than against, mindfulness being regarded as a spiritual activity. So, as with person-centredness, for some mindfulness is integral to their spiritual life and development and to others it is a pragmatic technique. Perhaps for the majority of committed practitioners (including Jon Kabat-Zinn?) it has a spiritual element, but for many of those being taught it as a healthcare approach it may be just another personal growth or health promotion technique. However, in contrast to the person-centred approach, mindfulness in Buddhism can be said to be part of a highly developed system to facilitate spiritual development.

Buddhism has a comprehensive and elaborate theory and practice of psychology (see Vassallo, 1984, and Goleman, 1981 for details) of which mindfulness is an integral part. Clearly then, within the context of Buddhist models of counselling/psychotherapy, mindfulness will have an aim of psychological development. Similarly in other contexts, e.g. committed meditators or mindfulness-based health care recipients, this must also be the case whether it is a stated goal or not. Any approach that fosters a deepening sense of awareness of self-in-the-world moment to moment must intend psychological development. As Taungpula (Vassallo 1984, p.185) has said "Whenever one knows what he is doing while he is doing it, knowledge will arise". Another way of expressing that would be 'congruence' – the goal of client-centred therapy (Purton 1996, p.456 and Mearns and Thorne 2000, p.198).

It would seem from the above that there is little or no conflict between the two

approaches having aims of both psychological and spiritual development, if that is the position adopted by the practitioner. However this analysis leaves out an important area of meditation which may be termed 'other states of consciousness'. There are a great variety of states and facets of consciousness that are described (e.g. Kornfield, pp.119-156, Goleman, p.130) some of which are seen as necessary steps towards awakening. Buddhist (and other) meditation can be said to go far beyond psychotherapy in terms of the theory and practice of spiritual development. At the level of what Kornfield calls "access concentration" (1994, p.137) it is in similar territory to psychotherapy but beyond that it traverses very different terrain; as Goleman says (1981, p.136) "No Western psychology even dreams of the deep structural transformation of consciousness that Buddhist psychology offers". This is a complex and difficult area of study and all that need concern us here is whether these other dimensions offered by meditation are incompatible with the aims of the person-centred approach.

Walsh (1980, pp.665-667) and Engler 1984, p.50) have both suggested that what we in the West regard as normal or optimal consciousness is in fact arrested development and psychopathological (Engler) or psychotic (Walsh). From this perspective it could be said that psychotherapy is helping people to refine their madness. Walsh claims there is a paradigm clash between Western psychotherapy and Eastern consciousness disciplines (p.668) because, although the Western paradigm can be seen as a sub-set of the larger Eastern paradigm, the Eastern view is inconceivable from a Western psychological perspective because we regard ordinary waking consciousness as optimal.

However, since Walsh wrote his paper in 1980 there have been developments in Western psychology, particularly in transpersonal psychology and the work of Ken Wilbur (e.g. Wilbur, 2000), which have allowed for higher states of consciousness and gone some

way to integrating Eastern and Western psychologies. For example Atwood and Maltin (1991, p.372) suggest that recent developments in the fields of developmental and transpersonal psychology have effectively recognised another stage of growth in the adult personality, a transcendent dimension which can be conceptualised as "spiritual". That being so I have no difficulty in seeing psychological and spiritual development as different stages on a continuum or developmental scale, with psychological health and growth being an earlier stage. This is a perspective endorsed by Engler (1984, p.52) and Tart and Deikman (1991, p.43). If then, as Van Kalmthout (1995, p.29) has said, the aim of (person-centred) therapy is to help people live in the "inner cosmic life force", this would seem similar to and compatible with the earlier stages of the meditation process such as Kornfields "access concentration". What the person-centred approach does not do is to provide a theoretical model of development beyond a notion (for some practitioners) of a transcendent dimension.

### c) Relationship and Change

The person-centred approach aims to engage two or more people in a relationship which has certain psychological characteristics, three of which are offered by the therapist to facilitate congruence in those others in the relationship. These three characteristics, famously known as 'the core conditions', are congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard. Person-centred theory says that if the therapist is able to embody these characteristics in the relationship then the other(s) is more likely to be in touch with their undistorted experiencing in the moment, and therefore better able to make positive and life enhancing choices. It may seem that I am straying into practice here but in fact relationship is fundamental to the theory of the person-centred approach. Mearns and Thorne (1999, p.22) say that relationship is "the aim of the counselling process with every client", and similarly Rogers (1951, p.53) said "The process of therapy is ..... seen as being synonymous with the experiential relationship

between client and therapist". To emphasise this person-centred writers sometimes quote what the well known existential therapist Yalom called "my professional rosary – It's the relationship that heals, the relationship that heals, the relationship that heals" (1991, p.91). Rogers (1957, p.221) went so far as to hypothesise "that significant personality change does not occur except in a relationship". He saw interpersonal communication as the gateway to experiencing the "organismic life flow" of reality (Van Kalmthout, 1995, p.30). To put it another way, the person-centred approach can be seen as a theory of healing relationship, therefore without relationship it has no purpose or function.

Practitioners of mindfulness meditation usually have a teacher, and in fact it is generally accepted in Buddhist circles that meditation is very hard to learn without personal contact with a teacher who is able to embody qualities such as tranquillity and insight (Purton 1996, p.463). Meditation teachers vary greatly in style, from the elevated guru to a down to earth spiritual friend, and the way in which students relate to the teacher will vary according to tradition and the personalities involved (Kornfield, 1980, 233). My own experience of mindfulness teachers to date has been that whilst they embody qualities such as compassion, wisdom, equanimity, and warmth they do not *engage* with the student in the same way as a person-centred practitioner. The relationship is not as personal, and the teacher does not get involved in the student's 'story' to the extent that a therapist would. Essentially meditation teachers are there to set an example and give guidance, which they do in a variety of ways including, didactic teaching, making suggestions and giving advice. Time spent with a teacher is a small percentage of the formal mindfulness learning process, most of which is individual, whether solitary or in a silent group. The guidance of a teacher can add greatly to that learning process but mostly you are 'on your own'.

Some writers (e.g. Santorelli, 1999, p.20; Kornfield, 1980, p.232) emphasise that

reciprocal love between student and teacher is central to the relationship in mindfulness meditation (see Appendix 3 for further comment). However this seems to me far less significant than the centrality and intensity of relationship in the person-centred approach. Crucially it is not claimed in mindfulness that individuals become 'enlightened' *because* of the relationship with their teacher(s). In the person-centred approach that is the case because "it's relationship that heals". This would seem to me to be a fundamental and perhaps incompatible difference between these two approaches.

However, I believe there are some commonalities and perspectives that deserve further exploration. It could be said that both person-centred therapy and mindfulness meditation enable us to become more skilful at relating to ourselves in undistorted ways. A thread running through this study is that being connected to ourselves-in-the-world is our natural state if we will only permit it. Mindfulness restores our capacity to connect through meditation, as does person-centredness (and other forms of psychotherapy) through a facilitating relationship (Epstein 1998, p.75). If, as Van Kalmthout claims (1998a, p.57), the ultimate goal of therapy is for the client to become their own therapist then the end-point seems very similar in both approaches, i.e. to develop enough inward awareness (mindfulness), acceptance/self love (compassion), and insight (wisdom) to a live more satisfying and fulfilled life. This point is supported by Osborne and Baldwin (1982, p.87) who say that despite the centrality of relationship, increasing self awareness through self observation is "central to Rogerian therapy".

At the point in our ordinary lives where we are drawing on both the intra- and inter-personal skills and insights learned in therapy/meditation, it is the relationship with ourselves that is critical. My experience of mindfulness practice is that I am learning experientially to develop a relationship with myself by being accepting of all of my experience in that

moment. This development of an accepting, honest and sensitive internal relationship seems, in effect, to be offering myself the core conditions of unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence (see also Appendix 3). This is very similar to the person-centred therapeutic process about which Rogers (1980, p.159) said, "persons (have) become, in their attitudes towards themselves, more caring and acceptant, more empathic and understanding, more real and congruent". In other words the client learns to offer to themselves the core conditions embodied by the therapist. That this process is similar to the one I experienced in mindfulness practice is supported by Purton (1996, p.463) who says, when discussing the differences between client-centred therapy and Buddhism,

> "The only really significant difference in method is that in client-centred therapy the clients' increasing congruence is facilitated by the empathy and respect embodied in the therapists' presence, whereas in Buddhism the meditator is developing self-respect and self-empathy in a more direct way."

From this perspective both approaches can be seen as educational; systems of experiential learning that will better equip the client/meditator to live a more satisfying and fulfilled life. This would be an acceptable view to many mindfulness teachers (e.g. Kabat-Zinn, 1999) but the person-centred approach seems somewhat wary of being described as educational, perhaps because it might smack of 'therapist as expert'.

However, even if we accept that ultimately both approaches are helping the client/meditator to a more congruent and life enhancing relationship with themselves-in-the world, the issue of relationship appears to be an important divergence of view. The person-centred approach facilitates by example and says that is its raison d'etre, whereas mindfulness facilitates by instruction as well as example. Each invites the client/mediator to reflect on their own experience and learn experientially. These two positions could be characterised thus:

Person-centred therapist: How do you find your world to be?

Mindfulness teacher: This is how the world is/This is how I find the world to be. How do you find the world to be?

Teachers of mindfulness-in-Buddhism are explicit about Buddhist views of the world and present them as truths. Those teaching mindfulness as a pragmatic healthcare system, e.g. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), are (much) less explicit (Kabat Zinn, 1990). The person-centred approach does, as we have seen, have a distinctive set of views about reality and the nature of life which it believes to be true, but it sets these aside in favour of the client discovering their own 'truth'. However these underlying beliefs are implicit in the therapists attitudes and responses. It would seem that the MBSR teacher is much closer to the person-centred therapist's position than many Buddhist meditation teachers. However, any practitioner influenced by both approaches is likely to feel heightened tension about the explicit/implicit nature of their underlying view of the world, as I do in my own practice. Despite some narrowing of differences (notably in MBSR) it would seem that the centrality of a particular non-directive relationship above all else means the person-centred approach is theoretically incompatible with mindfulness with regard to relationship as an instrument of change.

Although some might see it as heresy, perhaps there is room for a more psychotherapeutic style of personal relating within mindfulness teaching that would be beneficial in a Western context. This is discussed in general terms by Tart and Deikman (1991, pp.47-51). Also Tart, in discussion with Shinzen Young (1990, pp.145-146), advances the notion of a new kind of meditation facilitator who would be in close contact with the meditator, especially novices, and might do this on a system of one to one

appointments with a financial charge, in a similar way to psychotherapists (see Appendix 2 for relevant comment).

In this chapter I set out to examine the goals and aims of these two approaches and the context in which these are 'pursued'. It proved difficult to directly compare the goals of fully functioning and awakening but the underlying 'diagnosis' of incongruence or 'misperceiving and hence mis-living who you really are' (Purton, 1996, p.456) I consider to be fundamentally compatible. The aims of psychological and spiritual development seem to be common to both approaches, at least for some authors, and I consider them compatible when viewed as different stages on a developmental continuum. It is also acknowledged that mindfulness offers far more in terms of theory (and structured practice) for spiritual development than the person-centred approach. I then considered relationship, which is so fundamental to person-centred theory that without it it has no purpose or function; because it is 'the relationship that heals'. Although in mindfulness a relationship with a teacher is important it is not crucial as in person-centredness. This seems to be a fundamental difference in theory between the two. Further discussion reveals that both encourage the development of a relationship with self which is similar to offering the core conditions intra-personally. This is learned in the person-centred approach in response to the example of the therapist but in mindfulness individually and directly through a structured internal process, with some instruction and example from a teacher. From this perspective both approaches can be seen to be educational.

## CHAPTER 6 : CONCLUSION

In this chapter I will provide a summary of the study and bring the principal arguments to conclusion, whilst emphasising the main points of convergence and divergence between the two approaches. Arising from these I will consider the implications for theory and practice and make recommendations for further research and theoretical development. I will also make clear any limitations and biases that I am aware of in the study. Finally I will summarise my personal learning arising from this work.

### a) Summary and Conclusions

**Rationale, Approach and Methodology:** The aim of this study has been to examine the compatibility of the philosophical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the person-centred approach and mindfulness in order to clarify whether or not there is of theoretical consistency for practitioners influenced by both. Compatibility here means, able to coexist without fundamental confusion or contradiction. It is also hoped to make some contribution to debates around counselling/psychotherapy and spirituality; integrative and eclectic counselling/ psychotherapy; and comparisons between humanistic psychology and Buddhism. I was personally motivated to do the research as I practice both approaches and wished to understand whether the spontaneous synthesis between the two that I experience is theoretically sound. I have included my own process and opinions in order to make the work more congruent, and better expose biases that I bring to the work. In line with Lynch's (1996) contention that regardless of the availability of external criteria all research should demonstrate internal consistency, I have attempted to make my sources,viewpoints and biases explicit. I also propose that I am working from Lynch's perspective 2 : all knowledge is socially constructed rather than possessing absolute reality, therefore rather 'than seeking out

the truth' I am helping "us to live with a sense of meaning and purpose" (Lynch, p.246). Consequently I have asked what is compatible and consistent, not what is 'right'. This is a theoretical study not concerned directly with practice; however if theory better helps us understand and regulate our practice then this work will have some practical relevance.

The literature studied was primarily collected from three distinct groups i.e. the person-centred approach, psychotherapy/meditation studies, mindfulness and Buddhist sources. There is a bias in the collection of data in so far as this study is Western, academic and theoretical, therefore I had to select literature that was compatible with that perspective. Consequently when considering mindfulness I had to rely more on psychotherapy/meditation studies than direct Buddhist texts as Eastern traditions are not generally interested in explaining things but rather in direct non-analytical experience.

I used a thematic exploration of the material and these were selected from the principal topics discussed in the literature studied. A list of topics discarded is included on page 16. Given that I have a bias towards demonstrating that these approaches *are* compatible this might contain topics that unconsciously did not fit my perspective. However, as I failed to find complete compatibility I am less concerned that this might be so. No ethical issues, other than plagarism, were thought relevant.

**Views of Reality: oneness/nonduality** - In Eastern traditions there is an underlying view of the nondual nature of reality i.e. that the universe is indivisible, interdependant and dynamic at all levels. This perspective underpins mindfulness where concepts such as 'oneness' or 'non-seperateness' are often referred to. This view of the universe and our experience within it is now endorsed by many branches of Western science and is finding its way into psychology, including person-centred writing, e.g. Rogers (eg. 1980), Bozarth (1998) and

Merry (2000b). These writers endorse a holistic, dynamic, process oriented vision, by drawing on modern science and to a lesser degree Eastern traditions. They link individual experience with the universal and see us embedded in the dynamic flow of an evolving, all embracing process. Merry in particular, sees the person-centred 'way of being' as a natural method of opening up to our connectedness within this universal process. My own experience of person-centred practice and mindfulness meditation has led me to believe that given sufficient openness and awareness in the moment we can consciously inhabit this cosmic process. In our urbanised world we seem often to use consciousness to cut us off from this process within which we are enfolded. Both the person-centred approach and mindfulness provide opportunities for us to consciously embrace our position as an expression of a dynamic holistic reality.

**Views of Reality: spirituality** - There is a common confusion between spirituality and religion. The latter seems always to contain a spiritual element, but spirituality is not necessarily involved with religion. A commonality amongst the authors cited, when considering spirituality, is that it concerns consideration of our place in and connection to the universe. Drawing on these led me to offer my own definition of spirituality as 'consciously relating to a vast interdependent universal process of which I am unavoidably part and yet cannot wholly grasp.' I see my part in this process as (potentially) developmental in so far as I may grasp more and relate more fully over time. So for me spirituality is the conscious process of inhabiting, the dynamic non-duality of everything.

Mindfulness is part of the spiritual tradition of Buddhism and even when separated from that it can be seen as a practical and developmental activity concerned with awareness of and relating to connectedness, interdependence, impermanence and allowing what 'is'. In that way it is a spiritual activity as defined in this study. Rogers' original formulation of

client-centred therapy gradually evolved over 30 years into the ' person-centred approach' which he presented as 'a way of being', a philosophy of life to which he eventually attached transcendent and (more-tentatively) spiritual parameters. Had he lived longer Rogers might have clarified and developed these theoretical aspects in the way Van Kalmthout, Purton, Thorne and others have begun to do.

The person-centred approach is viewed as a philosophy of life by some practitioners, e.g. Van Kalmthout (1998) who has argued for it to be lifted out of the narrow confines of psychotherapy and viewed as a philosophy which embraces "cosmic meaning" and a life long journey. Although various writers have addressed this in different ways (e.g. Thorne, 1998; Purton, 1996; Van Kalmthout, 1998) each seems to be touching where the personal meets the universal and we sense participation in a mysterious yet coherent universal process which, within the definitions discussed in this study, can be regarded as spiritual. Once the distinction between religion and spirituality is clarified it seems that the person-centred approach can be viewed, at least potentially, as a spiritual activity. Indeed some, notably Thorne (1998), find their religion to be compatible with person-centred practice. Others (e.g. Mearns in Mearns and Thorne, 2000; Merry, 2000b) do not see the person-centred approach as spiritual, but there appears to be an acceptance of personal interpretation rather than claims of fundamental contradiction. In my view there is no incompatibility between the person-centred approach and mindfulness as vehicles for spiritual expression.

**Views of Reality: the formative and actualising tendencies -** Rogers (1980) hypothesised that there is a formative, directional tendency towards greater order, greater complexity and greater interrelatedness throughout the universe which he termed the 'formative tendency'. An expression of this, present in all organic life, is the actualising tendency, which in humans promotes development from a single cell right through to "transcendent awareness of the

harmony and unity of the cosmic system including human kind" (1980). Rogers said that taken together the formative and actualising tendencies are the "foundation blocks" of the person-centred approach. It is these that extend the approach into a philosophy of life, linking the individual with the universal and transcendent (Van Kalmthout, 1998). The actualising tendency is seen as the sole motivator for behaviour, change and development, a lifelong directional force that cannot be destroyed without destroying the organism. The implication for practice is that in order to develop our potentialities we need to dwell in the inner organismic life flow of this tendency, which is the process of actualisation. The importance of, and therefore believing in and trusting, the actualising tendency in the person-centred approach cannot be overstated.

Turning to mindfulness in Buddhism I can find no equivalent explicit motivational or directional force. Development is more a matter of 'uncovering' the universal buddha-nature within us all. It is conceived as seeing things as they truly are rather than making changes. The main difference would seem to be the directional nature of the actualising tendency. Each approach asks the practitioner to dwell in what is already there, however in the person-centred approach there is a sense of allowing yourself to be carried forward by the actualising tendency, whereas in trusting the buddha-nature it is more about being with what is already present. Perhaps they are both culture bound expressions of a similar concept, one arising from the action oriented 'can do' culture of post-war America and the other from an ancient slowly evolving Eastern culture that values 'being' over 'doing'. In so far as one approach proposes a single directional motivational force and the other (apparently)does not they could be said to be incompatible at this point. However in practice flowing with the actualising tendency seems so similar to trusting the buddha-nature that if we return to a metaphor of dancing, with more skilful dancing as the objective, the discussion seems more a matter of

semantics than underlying conflict.

In relation to these 'views of reality' it can be seen that both approaches propose a holistic, dynamic, process oriented view of reality which imbeds the individual in the universal. Both provide ways of consciously embracing and developing that position. If, as I propose, spirituality can be seen as the *conscious process* of inhabiting this oneness then both models can be chosen as spiritual activities. The goal of practice would seem to be inhabiting the cosmic stream of life. There is a 'naturalness' implied in all of this suggesting that we need to relearn our connectedness, relearn that "the natural is the spiritual" (Metzner, 1995, p.67).

**Models of the Self:** The person-centred approach envisions a self that under ideal environmental circumstances, prompted by the actualising tendency, would respond to experience in a spontaneous, authentic, life enhancing manner known as congruence. However, conditional influences from significant others, particularly in childhood, causes some distortion or denial to be built into the person's internal view of themselves known as their self-concept. The dissonance between the congruent (authentic) and incongruent (inauthentic) aspects of the self-concept causes distress and suffering. The self is seen as a product of response to experience and is constantly in flux, a process rather than an entity. As Thorne (1992) puts it "I am the self I currently conceptualise myself as being". Despite loose references to a organismic/real self, beyond the self-concept, in person-centred writing I can find no satisfactory description or definition, and I agree with Tolan (2001) that there is only "organismic experiencing".

In Buddhism the concept of a fixed self is considered to be a major delusion and cause of suffering. It stresses the impermanent, interdependent nature of all things including the

self. It is not that we do not exist as individuals but that we are not fixed; self is a process, a part of the non-separate nature of life. Underlying the self-as-process is our buddha-nature a place of inherent fearlessness and connectedness, integrity, and belonging (Kornfield 1994). If the universe is indivisible then the buddha-nature is an expression of that wholeness in us all, an expression of being part of one another. The buddha-nature is our participation in the cosmos and is the cosmos participating in us (Brazier 1995). Both Brazier and Kornfield describe a process of 'letting go' of a fixed self and trusting or uncovering our Buddha-nature so that the universal qualities will be expressed through our individual configurations.

There seems to be a significant convergence of view between the person-centred approach and mindfulness in Buddhism around the self-as-process. Each approach proposes an underlying universal characteristic or force which is wholely trustworthy and 'good' and available in each of us. Both encourage practitioners to let go of a fixed or rigid experience of themselves and allow the universal to be expressed through their shifting yet "unique configuration of cultural and biological processes" (Batchelor, 1997). I contend that neither model proposes a 'real self' beyond the self-concept but rather a direct connection with the universally shared formative/actualising tendency or the buddha-nature.

Two humanistic practitioners are cited (Rowan, 1983, 2001; Brazier, 1995) who appear to disagree with this as they see humanistic psychology (with which the person-centred approach is grouped) as concentrating on (real) self actualisation rather than the Buddhist approach of letting go of (a fixed) self. As I can find no real-self in person-centred literature I view actualisation as a process of connecting with organismic experiencing through an undistorted self concept. My own experience through practicing these two approaches confirms a shifting sense of self governed by my genetic inheritance, personal history, biological condition and crucially the quality of my awareness in that moment.

Beyond that I can experience a felt sense of what is 'right' which I take to be promptings of the actualising tendency/Buddha-nature.

**The Purpose and Context of Change:** In examining the purposes of these two approaches and the contexts in which these are pursued I considered goals, aims and relationship as an agent of change.

The goal of the person-centred approach is to be more in touch with our undistorted experiencing – "to be that self which one truly is" (Rogers, 1961). This involves moving towards certain positive characteristics termed **fully functioning** which is seen as a process not a destination. This process is directional, prompted by the actualising tendency, and experienced through the self-concept. The three defining characteristics are: increasing openness to experience; an ability to live fully in the present; trusting ones own organismic experiencing (Thorne, 1992). Rogers fully functioning person seems to be a theoretical end-point rather than an attainable ideal.

In Buddhism the goal is 'the release from suffering' and the Buddha taught a practical, experiental system known as **awakening** to achieve this. It also is seen as a process not a destination. The personality end-point of awakening is the Arhant, a saint-like figure, which also represents a seemingly unattainable ideal (Goleman, 1981).

It is difficult to compare these two aims directly because of the way they are described. However, it is possible to compare the underlying 'diagnosis'. Both approaches see 'unsatisfactoriness' (suffering) as due to not experiencing things as they really are (particularly ourselves), consequently the person "misperceives and hence miss-lives what they really are" (Purton, 1996). Both approaches can be seen to have a common goal of congruence i.e. perceiving things as they really are. These goals, and the process of moving

towards them, have ethical and personal development implications for practitioners which are discussed in Appendix 1.

The two aims for the person-centred approach and mindfulness most frequently raised in the literature are psychological and spiritual development. Psychological development is taken as a given for the person-centred approach and the case for spiritual development as an interpretation is made by a number of writers. For example Van Kalmthout (1995) speaks about the *purpose* of therapy being to help people live in the "inner force" and as I have made a case for the conscious dwelling in that force as a spiritual, as well as a psychological activity, I consider from this viewpoint spiritual development to be integral to the approach. However, person-centred theory does not provide a developmental structure for practice embracing spirituality in the way mindfulness or some other Western psychologies do. As there is a trend, which started with Rogers, to embrace the spiritual as part of the definition of the whole person theoretical developments to include this in practice would be helpful.

Mindfulness in Buddhism clearly has spiritual development as an aim and even from an agnostic or pragmatic viewpoint (e.g. Batchelor, 1997; Kabat-Zinn, 1990), as long as this is not confused with religion, it may be compatible. Personally I cannot imagine contemplating the interconnected and impermanent nature of all things without this being in part spiritual. Buddhism has a comprehensive psychology of which mindfulness is a part particularly as it fosters a deep sense of self-in-the-world-as-process moment to moment.

There would be little or no conflict between the two approaches in the twin aims of psychological and spiritual development if that is the approach of the practitioner. However, there is another dimension in meditation concerned with other states of consciousness which could be seen as conflictual. This is considered to be largely beyond the scope of the study but an issue raised by Walsh (1980) suggesting incompatibility is discussed. Walsh and

Engler (1984) say that Eastern traditions consider normal waking consciousness as arrested development or psychopathological, whereas Western psychology considers it optimal and have often regarded 'higher' states of consciousness as madness. Walsh says there is a paradigm clash as, although Western thinking can be seen as a subset of Eastern models, anything 'beyond' the optimal waking consciousness is seen as psychosis, and therefore inadmissible as a positive state in Western thinking. However, recent developments in developmental and transpersonal psychology allow for a transcendent stage of growth in adult personality which can be seen as spiritual (Atwood and Maltin, 1991). In view of this I have no difficulty in seeing psychological and spiritual development as different stages on a continuum with psychological health and development being an earlier stage, which is a perspective endorsed by Engler (1984) and Tart and Deikman (1991). Perhaps this view is a pointer for further developments in person-centred theory.

**Relationship and Change:** Relationship as the context for change is fundamental to the person-centred approach. Mearns and Thorne (1999) see it as the *aim* of the counseling process – the relationship is the therapy. The person-centred approach can be seen as a theory and practice of healing relationship, without it it has no function or purpose. Although the influence of a teacher is important in mindfulness the quality of the relationship is less personal and it is not crucial as it is in person-centredness. This seems to be a fundamental and incompatible difference between the two approaches.

However, further discussion reveals commonalities. Mindfulness restores our capacity to connect through meditation as the person-centred approach does through a facilitating relationship (Epstein, 1998). Mindfulness in practice is about learning to be accepting of however I am and to fully receive all of my (undistorted) experience in the moment. This is in effect like offering the core conditions to myself. This is very similar to

the person-centred therapeutic process about which Rogers (1980) said "persons become, in their attitudes towards themselves, more caring and acceptant, more empathic and understanding, more real and congruent", i.e. the client offers themselves the conditions embodied by the therapist. This perspective is supported by Purton (1996) who considers the only significant difference in method between the two is that in client-centred therapy increased client congruence is facilitated by the empathy and respect embodied by the therapist, whereas in Buddhism the meditator develops self-respect and empathy in a more direct way. Both can be seen as systems of experiential learning which hinge on developing a more honest, respectful and understanding relationship with yourself. Central to the person-centred approach is a particular kind of non-directive relationship and the underlying views of the world are only implicit in the therapist's attitudes and responses. Conversely many meditation teachers are explicit about the Buddhist views of the world which they present as the truth, although this is much less true of Mindfulness-Base Stress Reduction teachers.

It is around the issue of relationship that I sense the two approaches have most to learn from one another, and where more research would be helpful. However, despite these commonalities I have to conclude that the person-centred approach and mindfulness are incompatible with regard to the role of relationship and any practitioners influenced by both would need to be mindful of this.

**In summary I believe the main points of convergence and divergence between the two approaches to be:**

- both propose a holistic, dynamic process oriented view of reality.
- If spirituality is seen as in the process of consciously inhabiting our position in that

'oneness' both can be viewed as spiritual activities, if that is your position.

- Both consider being in touch with a benevolent, universal tendency or nature as the key to a developmental path, and each provides a method for achieving that.

- Whilst the actualising tendency is directional and the buddha – nature more an 'uncovering' I believe this relates more to cultural expression than incompatibility.

- Both propose a self-as-process embedded in an indivisible reality and each encourages practitioners to let go of a fixed view of self in order to realise that.

- Mindfulness-in-Buddhism proposes levels of psycho-spiritual development that go well beyond the person-centred-approach. However if viewed as different stages on a continuum I believe they are compatible.

- Both have developmental goals which are best viewed as process rather than destination and might be expressed as 'seeing things as they really are'.

- Relationship as the medium for change and development is crucial in the person-centred approach but not in mindfulness. Despite making the case that ultimately both are about forming a similar relationship with yourself, I have to conclude this is an important point of theoretical incompatibility.

**With the exception of relationship as an medium for change I believe I have demonstrated a high degree of theoretical compatibility between the person-centred approach and the Buddhist concept of mindfulness. This being so any practitioner influenced by both can be confident of the integrity of their personal/professional philosophy; that their view of reality, spirituality, the self and life's purpose are coherent.** However, I do not mean to imply that there is therefore a compatibility of practice,

or the desirability of an integrative approach. These are topics that would require further detailed research.

With regard to the wider issues mentioned in Chapter 1, this study has explored spirituality and the person-centred approach fairly thoroughly so contributing to the psychotherapy and spirituality debate. Regarding integrative/eclectic approaches to counselling psychotherapy its main contribution may be the importance of examining underlying paradigms before bringing together different strands of practice. The third issue was the comparison of humanistic psychology and Buddhism in which this study has raised some different points of view and interpretations from those of Brazier (1995), the most notable author in this rather sparse field.

**b) Recommendations**

The following are the topics that have arisen in the course of this work where further research and theoretical development would seem to be most useful.

- If the person-centred approach is to fully embrace the holistic vision of the person offered by Rogers it needs to further extend theory and practice to include spirit (and body) as well as mind. This may include recognising a further stage of adult psychological development that includes the spiritual.

- Mindfulness teaching could consider further embracing the 'engaged relationship' as a medium for facilitating change in Western practice.

- The person-centred approach might profit from being more congruent and explicit in practice about its vision of reality and human development.

- It would be interesting to know more about the effects of the person-centred approach

as a 'system of meaning' on the lives of counsellors and therapists. I know of only one reference (Stillwell 1998) relevant to this topic.

- Given the compatibility of theory it would be interesting to investigate compatibility and even integration of practice between mindfulness and the person-centred approach. As their systems of meaning are so convergent could this revolve around offering a client-centred relationship within a mindfulness framework? The work of Purton (1996) points in this direction.

### c. Epilogue

In order to complete the 'gestalt' of this work I intend closing on a personal note. Researching and writing this study has been part of a learning process that started before it and will go on after it for neither personal nor public theory is static (as some recent Buddhist publications demonstrate 2500 years on). This work is a facet of what I see as a lifelong personal process to which the poet Rumi refers - *"I wandered in pursuit of myself. I was the traveller and I am the destination"*. In the new holistic vision of reality a relationship with ourselves is a relationship with the world. If we can offer ourselves respect, honesty and understanding we are unavoidably offering that to the world.

During the course of this work I have learned a great deal about these two approaches and their place in my life. What I get from each betrays their origins and lineage. Mindfulness-in-Buddhism provides me with a highly evolved philosophy and methodology for investigating myself-in-the-world which truly is a 'way of being'. Person-centredness provides me with a rich and challenging 'way of being with others' and an underlying philosophy which for me offers more than it as yet delivers. It is in my interpersonal relationships that I feel the full benefit and challenge of person-centredness. Together these

two approaches provide me with what (still) feels like radical and counter-cultural positions that are demanding and yet deeply convincing. At root they both seem to ask me to retrain my conscious mind to engage with a natural process in order to know the world as it truly is. In T S Elliot 's famous lines from 'Little Gidding'

*We shall not cease from exploration*

*and the end of all our exploring*

*will be to arrive where we started*

*and know the place for the first time.*

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## APPENDIX 1: The Implications of 'Path' for Counsellors and Teachers

The theoretical frameworks that support the person-centred approach and mindfulness propose 'ways of being' and developmental paths which have considerable implications for the lives of practitioners. Although these are mostly implications for practice and therefore outside the main body of this study it seems useful to comment on this here.

In mindfulness teaching it is expected that teachers will have a long term personal commitment to the approach that will embrace all of their lives. The person-centred approach seems to have similar personal implications, particularly for counsellors and therapists. It emphasises an honest, respectful compassionate way of relating; a belief in a underlying positive force (actualisation) and the basic trustworthyness of human nature; an egalitarian view of persons and (for some) transcendent or spiritual dimensions; coupled with this there is a reiteration of the need for career long personal development. Together these seem to constitute an approach to life to which the practitioner is unavoidably committed. Various authors have commented on this, for example Thorne (2000, p.87) considers that in order to develop the quality of 'presence' that can be so healing in a therapeutic relationship the therapist must be willing to "live out consistently and profoundly the philosophy that the person-centred approach embraces". Rogers (1961, p.196) commenting on this aspect said "This ..... is not, I am convinced, a life for the faint hearted. It involves stretching and growing, of becoming more and more of one's potentialities. It involves the courage to be". Van Kalmthout (1998a, p.17) put it another way "It is incongruent to live differently from what one preaches. As a person-centred therapist or teacher one cannot be neutral or indifferent to the basic values and goal of person-centred theory. The theory constitutes a

living part of one's personal life". It seems that both of these approaches provide a system of meaning out of which arises the imperative of an ethical and developmental path which cannot be set aside by their practitioners.

## APPENDIX 2: Concepts of Growth and Healing

There is often an apparently conflicting view of 'change' between Western psychology and Eastern traditions which, although more to do with attitude than theoretical concepts, is useful to comment on here as it can cause confusion when considering the person-centred approach and mindfulness.

The vocabulary used in the West frequently includes words such as 'growth/ development/change' whereas in Eastern traditions it is more often 'healing/wholeness'. Generally in Eastern traditions, including Buddhism, the individual is considered to be fundamentally already whole or complete, but this is often obscured by suffering (Purton, 1996, p.456); hence the concept of 'healing into wholeness'. This is seen as returning to the Buddha-nature within; as Kornfield (1994, p.167) says "It has always been here, and it is never too late to find it". By contrast in Western psychotherapy it can often appear that the individual must strive to change who they are in order to be happier/healthier. Osborne and Baldwin (1982, p.268) describe this contrast as, Eastern and esoteric traditions having a "receptive mode of knowing" whereas, Judeo-Christian traditions, including psychotherapy, have an "action oriented approach" which is exemplified by 'the problem is being worked upon'. This throws up a paradox inherent in the Eastern, and Buddhist, approach, i.e. 'the best way to get somewhere is not to try to go anywhere' (Kabat-Zinn, Massion, Herbert and Rosenbaum, 1998, p.769). John Welwood (1980, p.136) explains this less paradoxically as "the essential core of healing is how we can *be* with ourselves rather than anything we can *do* to change or improve ourselves". Osborne and Baldwin (p.86) make the further point that abandoning the view that you need to change yourself or your environment paradoxically may produce significant changes in your life.

This conflict between 'being' and 'doing' in meditation and psychotherapy would perhaps be most obvious when considering an approach such as cognitive-behavioural

therapy, but in my reading of the person-centred approach I see little or no conflict. For example Rogers (1957, p.406) sees human behaviour as "exquisitely rational, moving with subtle and ordered complexity towards the goals his organism is endeavouring to achieve". Elsewhere (1967, p.181) he talks about individuals moving toward acceptance of the "is-ness" of themselves (interestingly 'is-ness' is a Buddhist term). Van Kalmthout (1998b, p.57), discussing personality change, says that in popular usage this refers to replacing one personality with another, as it were 'becoming a different person', which he sees as quite different from the person-centred description of personality change as "to be that self which one truly is". He goes on to compare (p.58) this as being not very different from older philosophical traditions who's major aim is 'the search for truth' and says "one such example is Buddhism".

Reading these authors it seems to me that the concepts of 'change' in both the person-centred approach and Buddhism are a kind of 'reconnecting' or 'uncovering' which have much in common. In the West with our cause and effect, progressive development models we are apt to see change as linear. This is encouraged by the common metaphor of life's 'journey'. However, as Kornfield says (1994, p.172) it is better described as a "widening circle or spiral". It can be seen as an expansion or deepening devoid of the trappings of 'moving on'. I am also fond of 'dancing' as a metaphor for life's underlying process; the point is to become more skilful at dancing.

## APPENDIX 3: Lovingkindness

A number of writers have said that at root the person-centred approach is about love – the love of the therapist for the client expressed through the core conditions (Van Kalmthout, 1995, p.30) and the developing self-love of the client (Mearns and Thorne, 1999, p.24; Thorne, 1998, p.88) as they learn to offer the core conditions to themselves. Interestingly in mindfulness meditation teaching another practice, that of lovingkindness (metta) meditation, is often incorporated. It is as if this provides the warm heartedness to add to the concentration and detached interest of mindfulness (vipassana) meditation. Sumedho (1999, p.169) says "With metta there is a sense of embracing everything with an attitude of patience, nonaversion, and kindness, without singling out one experience as deserving of more or less love. This love is unconditional". It seems to me that lovingkindness meditation is often added to mindfulness as, in person-centred terms, it encourages the ability of the meditator to offer themselves and others unconditional positive regard.

## APPENDIX 4: Effectiveness in Psychological and Spiritual Development

Whether both approaches can pursue the aims of psychological and spiritual health and development equally effectively is a question largely concerned with practice, but it has implications for compatibility and cross fertilisation that are useful to comment on here. Tart and Deikman (1991, pp.35-36) have argued that the self observing mind will be simultaneously defending some wounded areas of the self and it is therefore very difficult for it to open up its own defences. In these instances, particularly with regard to problems resulting from past trauma, a therapist can help uncover and confront these defended areas to the benefit of the client. Kornfield (1994, pp.244-46) makes a similar point saying that "what American practice has to come to acknowledge is that many of the deep inner issues we uncover in spiritual life cannot be healed by meditation alone". He goes on to say that many of these problems (e.g. addiction, childhood abuse) are charecteristic of Western societies and were not commonly found in the East (at least in the past), therefore traditional practices are not well equipped to deal with them. Perhaps for that reason Kornfield considers that in the West psychotherapy is beginning to have a "significant impact on Buddhism".

From my own experience as a client and meditator I have generally found the relational process of psychotherapy to be quicker and more 'potent' in dealing with specific issues than meditation. Having said that meditation slowly, inevitably and profoundly changes thing for me. Dieckman (Tart and Dieckman, 1991, pp.43) catches this difference when he says "Psychotherapy and spiritual development are two different levels of the same continuum, but they do not substitute for each other, as far as I can tell. They work synergistically with each other".